

**EXPORTING THE ETHICS OF EMPTINESS:
APPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND POSSIBILITIES
OF WATSUJI TETSURÔ'S ETHICAL SYSTEM**

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Notes to the Reader

- “WTZxx” refers to volume xx of Watsuji Tetsurô, *Watsuji Tetsurô zenshû*, 27 volumes, ed. Abe Yoshishige, et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1991-1992).
- The pagination of the English translation is indicated by a parenthesis: “WTZxx, yy (zz)” where yy is the original Japanese pagination and zz is the pagination in the translation. See the bibliography for the list of English translations used.
- For previously untranslated sections of Japanese works, the author has provided his own translations. For the reader’s reference, the original Japanese is provided in the footnotes, but only for the author’s own translations and particularly contentious passages.
- For key words, the Romanized Japanese original is provided in parentheses. Kanji is only included when deemed necessary to avoid confusion. Other languages are indicated by abbreviations: De. (German), Skt. (Sanskrit), Fr. (French).
- All Romanization has been done following the modified Hepburn method. Long vowels are indicated with a circumflex (ex. “Tetsurô”) rather than a macron.
- All Japanese, Chinese, and Korean names are given in the traditional order: “Surname First Name.”
- The references in the footnotes do not include kanji. For these, please see the bibliographic entry. Generally, translations of book titles are only given for Watsuji’s works.

Foreword

In 2009, I began teaching Watsuji Tetsurô's ethical system in the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines¹—a practice I continued over several semesters in various courses (“Japanese Philosophy,” “Foundations of Moral Value,” “Ethics and Cultural Difference”). These classes were taught with an existential and philosophical-anthropological approach rather than a historical approach, stressing the use of Watsuji's system as a tool for each student in his or her path of coming to terms with life.

The response to Watsuji was overwhelmingly positive. Many of my students resonated with the tension between individuality and totality as mirrored in their own attempts to reconcile the need for independence as young adults and the need to maintain a sense of connectedness with family, friends, and society as a whole. In particular, many of my Chinese-Filipino students were struck by Watsuji's both “Confucian” and “Anti-Confucian” moments—a paradox that was timely as they struggled with the expectations of their families. For these students, neither a one-sided adherence to “individual autonomy” nor one to a “social philosophy of harmony” gave a sufficient response to their own personal experiences. It seemed difficult to resolve their moral dilemmas to an either/or between the Kantian autonomous will or a Confucian relational order. Thus the tension

¹ I was employed at the Department of Philosophy, School of Humanities, and the Japanese Studies Department, School of Social Sciences from 2005 to 2011.

inherent within Watsuji's vision of human existence resonated with them in a direct and personal way.

Other students responded to a different side of Watsuji—the religious side. Having studied the rudiments of Theravāda and Zen Buddhism, they were very interested in the project of overcoming the selfish ego. But at the same time, they were interested in what it might mean in a social context. This is perhaps due to the fact that the Ateneo de Manila University is a Jesuit institution that stresses the connection between the spiritual exercises and service (“being men and women for others”). Watsuji's idea that emptiness is expressed both individually and socially seemed to suggest possible ways in which Buddhism might play a role in their social and political lives.

A few students who were more interested in Philippine Studies and Japanese Studies seemed drawn to Watsuji for a different reason. They often spoke of how Watsuji appropriated ideas from Heidegger and Hegel and transformed them to fit Japan, and thought about what the Philippines might need to do, as it tries to carve out a path for “Filipino Philosophy.” They seemed quite piqued by Watsuji's conscious wrestling with the ideas of “Japaneseness” and “cultural uniqueness,” while engaging in “universal” fields like Ethics and Philosophical Anthropology.

Struck by this strong response, I conducted an informal survey amongst more than 200 students, and most of the students voted Watsuji as their favorite ethical theorist (over Theravāda Buddhist theory, Confucianism, Immanuel Kant, and a few others). While these results may have been skewed by my own personal interest in Watsuji or the particular way I taught my courses, they further reinforced my intuition that Watsuji was potentially very important not merely as a “Japanese philosopher” but as a philosopher for everyone.

However, when I came to Japan in 2011 in hopes of continuing my studies on figures like Watsuji, I was in for a shock: The Japanese scholars around me were almost unanimously critical of Watsuji. “Totalitarian,” “collectivist,” “lackey,” “*nihonjinron*”—I was unprepared for this scathing critique. And as I began to read more critical scholars like Sakai Naoki and follow their leads into Watsuji’s own works, I found many of these criticisms confirmed.

These experiences led me to a state of perplexity: How is it possible that the same philosopher who inspired so much admiration amongst my students in the Philippines and in much of the literature available in English could be so thoroughly lampooned in Japan? How could one person present such an inspiration for key theoretical and practical concerns, but be guilty of such damning errors at the same time?

This dissertation is my attempt to wrestle with this perplexity. In doing so, I hope I did more than just clarify my thoughts, but re-read Watsuji in a way that might make him useful once again for English-speaking scholars around the world.

Introduction

1 Statement of the Problem

In this dissertation, I would like to engage in what might seem like an elementary task: To closely examine Watsuji's systematic ethics in order to see a) what his overall project was fundamentally about, b) if his positive appraisal and use is sufficiently founded in his texts, c) to what extent his critiques are valid and the limitations these critiques reveal, and d) given these strengths and weaknesses, if it is possible to read (or re-read) Watsuji in a way that is fruitful in responding to the philosophical questions and pragmatic concerns shared across the globe.

However, the attempt to explore Watsuji's contributions and failings has led me to four theoretical dilemmas that Watsuji himself faced and through which he is often judged: First, are we really able to unify with others in relationships, or are we fundamentally separate singularities (singularity vs. relationality)? Second, is socio-ethical life to be taken from the standpoint of the individual or from that of the community (liberalism vs. communitarianism)? Third, is ethical life ruled by a universal principle, or is it relative to cultures and historical ages (moral universalism vs. relativism)? And fourth, is ethical life always-already present within everyday life, or does it require a critical transcendence of how things are (everydayness vs. transcendence)?

I focus on these *dilemmas*, not because all positions are necessarily reducible to two terms, but because these dualisms illustrate the *tensions* that confound the attempt to

deal with life in a schematized fashion. And, needless to say, these four dilemmas are among the most difficult quandaries of philosophy. Through this dialogical reading of these four dilemmas, I hope to not only clarify the content of Watsuji's thought and its uses, but expose the universal difficulty of wrestling with these problems (as we shall see in a comparative study with other philosophical attempts to grapple with these dilemmas) and new possibilities of how we might continue to address them through the inspiration of Watsuji's ideas.

2 The Life and Works of Watsuji¹

Watsuji Tetsurô (和辻哲郎) was born in Nibuno, Hyôgo Prefecture, in 1889. He was the second son of a service-minded physician, whose Confucian values would eventually play a decisive role in Watsuji's life. He went to high school in 1906 at the First Higher School in Tokyo, alongside another well-known figure peripheral to the Kyoto School, Kuki Shûzô (1888-1941). In 1909, he entered the Tokyo Imperial University, Faculty of Literature, majoring in philosophy. He had a difficult relationship with his mentor Inoue Tetsujirô (1855-1944), particularly over his thesis on Friedrich Nietzsche which was deemed not sufficiently philosophical. He hurried to write a second thesis, "Schopenhauer's Pessimism and Theory of Salvation," which he wrote in English for the famed Professor Raphael Koeber. There was one good thing that came out of this ordeal—Watsuji had to

¹ Biographical information was collated from the commentaries in the various volumes of *WTZ* and from sources like the following:

A. Jacinto Zavala, "Watsuji Tetsurô," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*, trans. ed. Dilworth, David, Viglielmo Valdo, and Augustin Jacinto Zavala (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 221-226.

Steve Bein, "Introduction," in *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen* by Watsuji Tetsurô (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 3-10.

live in the house of his roommate Takase, whose sister Teru often came to clean the house. She ended up helping Watsuji with his thesis, and he married her in 1912. (Watsuji's relatively smooth and loving family life presages his concern with the family and the house, or "ie.")

Shortly after getting married, he graduated and went to graduate school in the same university. He quickly began what was to be a very prolific academic career, publishing his first book *Nietzsche Studies* in 1913, quickly followed by *Søren Kierkegaard* in 1915. As we see, his early interest was in individualist, existentialist poet-philosophers from Europe. However, his interests would take an about-face shortly after, starting from *Revival of Idols* (1918), where he began to display a deep interest in Japanese culture. This would be followed by *Pilgrimages to the Ancient Temples [in Nara]* (1919) and *Ancient Japanese Culture* (1920). His essay on Dôgen, which was part of *Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit* (1926) would prove groundbreaking.

In 1925, the founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy Nishida Kitarô (1870-1945) invited him to teach ethics at the Philosophy Department of Kyoto Imperial University. At first, Watsuji was uncomfortable with the idea, but he eventually yielded to the older philosopher. Two years later, he would take a scholarship to study in Europe. Here, he would encounter Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (which he read the very year it was published), and that, in combination with his travels, would result in perhaps his most famous book, *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations* (to be published in 1935). After 14 months in Europe, he returned to Kyoto. His entire stay in Kyoto would result in the publication of the first key work of his systematic ethical period: *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* (1934).

In 1934, he transferred to Tokyo Imperial University as a full professor. He would stay there until his retirement in 1949. Over these turbulent 15 years, while the Pacific War was kindled, raged, and died, Watsuji would write the three volume masterpiece that is the focus of this dissertation: *Ethics* (1937, 1942/46, 1949). He also published several key supporting works on Kant, Greek thought and Confucianism, as well as key wartime works on the emperor and the infamous *The Way of the Japanese Subject and America's National Character* (1944).

In his retirement, he would write extensively on his reflections on Japan's defeat, particularly in two books: *National Isolation: Japan's Tragedy* (1950) and *Buried Japan* (1951). He also wrote his second masterpiece, *The History of Japanese Ethical Thought* (1952). Toward his last days, his writings were primarily focused on theories of art. He died in 1960 with an unfinished autobiography and an unfinished final book on Buddhist thought.

Today, Watsuji remains one of the most popular philosophers in Japan. In high school textbooks, the Kyoto School and its auxiliary members are usually represented by Nishida and Watsuji alone—giving an indication of the latter's stature. He is best known for his work on *Milieu* as well as the idea of ethics “as a study of *ningen*.” However, his reception is much more nuanced in academic circles, where it alternates from very warm to harshly critical. We will examine this further in the review of related literature.

3 Scope and Limitations

As one can see above, Watsuji's work covers a very broad array of interests: Existentialism, cultural philosophy, Buddhism, ethical theory and history, and aesthetics. I will be focusing primarily on his systematic ethical works: *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, and

Ethics vols. 1 to 3. I will also examine the works that directly connect to this—*Milieu, Personality and Humanity*, some relevant essays, and the connections to his earlier Buddhist work (*The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism, The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*). While I will occasionally touch on his work on world culture, Japanese culture, and the history of ethics, I will not be focusing on these.

Also, Watsuji's systematic ethics has an immense scope. I will be focusing on the four main themes I outlined above, as they are *theoretical ethical concerns* that continue to be debated globally. There is one theme that hangs heavy on these ethical ideas—that of politics and the emperor system. While I will touch on his *theory* of the state and of international relations, I do not wish to go too deeply into the problem of the emperor system as this has been discussed sufficiently by critics like Sakai Naoki, Harry Harootunian, and Chiara Brivio.

This brings us to concerns of approach and field of study. In this dissertation, I wish to primarily employ a contemporary, comparative philosophical approach to Watsuji's systematic ethics, in the spirit of International Japanese Studies. I will keep in mind the entirety of Watsuji's corpus, the field of Watsuji studies (in both Japan and abroad), the history of Japanese philosophy (*nihonshisôshi*), the history of Japan, and Japanese cultural studies—all of which are indispensable for a proper understanding of Watsuji. But for this dissertation, I wish to leave these as background *presuppositions* in order to focus on a careful analysis of the concepts within Watsuji's systematic ethics, read from the context of contemporary philosophy, with an eye toward comparative philosophy and the inter-disciplinary approach that Watsuji himself espoused. Therefore, while I recognize and am personally interested in a lot of possible connections—between Watsuji and other members of the Kyoto School of Philosophy (like Nishida Kitarô

[1870-1945], Tanabe Hajime [1885-1962], Miki Kiyoshi [1897-1945], Nishitani Keiji [1900-1990], etc.), on the intellectual, socio-political and historical context of Watsuji's writings, and on the connections to Watsuji's existential or cultural philosophy—I will refer only briefly to these themes, and the scholars who focus on them, in order to fully develop the aspects I have noted above. In doing so, while recognizing the importance of other approaches, I wish to highlight Watsuji not as a relic of Japan or its history, but as a living dialogue partner as we face the problems of *global society today*.

4 Review of Related Literature

4.1 In Western Languages

Let us briefly examine the literature on Watsuji in western languages, focusing primarily on those available in English. Watsuji studies in the Anglosphere all begins with Geoffrey Bownas's translation of *Fûdo: Ningengakuteki Kôsetsu* (1935) as *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study* (1961). This was one of the first books of Japanese philosophy to be translated into English, and it also included an essay by Furukawa Tetsushi entitled "Watsuji Tetsuro, the Man and his Work," which introduced the position of *Fûdo* among the rest of Watsuji's writings. It also briefly introduced Watsuji's idea of ethics as it was developed in his ethical system.

This translation was followed by the well-known American sociologist Robert Bellah's (1927-2013) excellent critique of Watsuji in 1965 entitled "Japan's Cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsuro." Not only was this journal article a very broad introduction to Watsuji's works and its philosophical influences, it was a scathing critique of the tendency of Watsuji (and Japan as a whole) toward national narcissism, the deification of the state, and a very weak sense of individual criticality.

This dissertation takes up many of Bellah's critiques and considers them quite carefully. But his main points—that universalism is the answer to totalitarianism and that Watsuji's particularism is fundamentally Japanese—is something that, given American imperialism and the problems of secular liberalism, I am not inclined to agree with.

David Dilworth was another key figure in the introduction of Watsuji to the Anglosphere. He translated several essays of Watsuji, such as “Japanese Ethical Thought in the Noh Plays of the Muromachi Period” (1969) and the first chapter of *Ethics*: “The Significance of Ethics as the Study of Man” (1971). He also presented one of the first analyses/defenses of Watsuji's ethical system in “Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician” (1974). In this article, he opposes Bellah's critique of Watsuji as a national particularist, and, by showing how Watsuji appropriates western philosophical ideas, argues for Watsuji's universal philosophical value. His key contributions here are an examination of Natsume Sôseki's influence on Watsuji and a philosophical analysis of milieu and the dual-structure of *ningen* as the two pillars of Watsuji's system.

The reception of Watsuji was split from the beginning, with a more positive reception of Watsuji from the side of philosophers, Buddhologists and theorists, and a more negative, critical reception from Japanologists, sociologists, and historians.

On the side of the more positive appraisals of Watsuji's philosophy, one key name is William R. LaFleur (1936-2010), an American Japanologist who wrote on a broad range of themes related to Buddhism and culture. He was the first to focus on Buddhist themes in Watsuji in his “Buddhist Emptiness in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Watsuji Tetsurô” (1978). (We will take up his argument with Dilworth on this point in Chapter V.) He also wrote on Watsuji's “turn” (toward Japanese culture) in the article “A Turning

in *Taishô: Asia and Europe in the Early Writings of Watsuji Tetsurô*” (1990). In 1994, he turned to more political themes in “An Ethics of As-Is: State and Society in the Rinrigaku of Watsuji Tetsurô.” This is a key publication because it is one of the few works to examine the second volume of *Ethics*. It was a very balanced treatment of Watsuji, where, for the first time, LaFleur was quite critical of totalitarian tendencies in the Japanese thinker. (Although he did maintain his appraisal of Watsuji’s value as a communitarian thinker and critic of western modernity.) He continues this discussion in “Reasons for the Rubble: Watsuji Tetsurô’s Position in Japan’s Postwar Debate about Rationality” (2001), which discusses Watsuji’s postwar works and positively appraises his consistent (though sometimes concealed) value for cultural openness.

Other scholars continued this tradition of positively reading Watsuji by focusing on comparative studies of his theory and/or Buddhist themes in his thought. Nagami Isamu expounded on the Buddhist origins of Watsuji’s theories in “The Ontological Foundation in Tetsurô Watsuji’s Philosophy: Kû and Human Existence” (1981). Steve Odin, in a 1992 article included in his book *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* (1996), not only compares Watsuji to thinkers like George Herbert Mead, but also gives a full review of the critiques and contributions of Watsuji in Japan and the Anglosphere. Similarly, John Maraldo has written several articles on Watsuji, focusing on the non-duality of the individual and the community and attempting to make use of these readings in various contemporary discourses. (He will be our key dialogue partner in Chapter III.) Recently, Leah Kalmanson and Joel Krueger have contributed comparative studies of Watsuji and Emmanuel Levinas. Additionally, there are also positive readings of Watsuji focusing on the concept of *fûdosei*, especially by Inaga Shigemi and Augustin Berque.

In 1996, Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter came out with *Watsuji Tetsurô's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*. This translation of *Ethics I* paved the way for a great increase in academic writings on Watsuji from fields outside of Japanese studies. However, this also led to a general bias towards Watsuji's theoretical work and idea of milieu, and a neglect of Watsuji's more concrete and political applications of his ethics. I argue that this bias can be seen in Graham Mayeda's *Time, Space and Ethics in the Thought of Watsuji Tetsurô, Kuki Shûzô, and Martin Heidegger* (2006) and Erin McCarthy's *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies* (2010), which, despite their philosophical acuity, almost never mention the second or third volumes of *Ethics*, even where their arguments would greatly be altered by such.

My first exposure to Watsuji was through the translation of Yamamoto and Carter, and was supplemented by these positive readings of Watsuji, particularly by LaFleur. My teaching using Watsuji was also from this optimistic and perhaps politically naïve angle, leading to my great surprise when I first encountered the other side of Watsuji studies, as pointed out by critical scholars in Japan.

The critical tradition of negative readings of Watsuji that was begun by Bellah has often been carried out by Japanologists and historians who are much less likely to rely on the English translations (as many of the later optimistic readings of Watsuji were). In the English works, this critical tradition is a minority. However, the following scholars have carried out important work. Peter N. Dale's *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (1991) criticized Watsuji as a prime example of *nihonjinron*. Harry D. Harootunian's *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (2001) saw Watsuji's work as part of the (failed) attempt of Japan to overcome Western modernity. This critical

trend has continued with contemporary works, such as in the articles of Bernard Bernier, and Chiara Brivio's dissertation *The Human Being: When Philosophy Meets History: Miki Kiyoshi, Watsuji Tetsurô and their Quest for a New Ningen* (2009), which again sees Watsuji's ethical system as a failed project that hitched its vision of the human being to the eschatological image presented by the imperial Japanese state.

Of these critical writings, I have been deeply inspired and influenced by Sakai Naoki's *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (1997), which, I believe, is the single best book available in English on Watsuji. The book is primarily a critique of cultural essentialism and the violence, nationalism, imperialism and racism that accompany such. From the introduction, Sakai introduces a critique of a "homolingual address," which is a mode of speaking that presumes the unity of one cultural whole in opposition to other cultural wholes—a critique that has direct implications for Watsuji's particularism. (See Chapter IV.) This is continued in Chapter 2, "The Problem of 'Japanese Thought': The Formation of 'Japan' and the Schema of Cofiguration," which criticizes Watsuji's presumption of a national whole of Japan. Chapter 3, "Return to the West/Return to the East: Watsuji Tetsurô's Anthropology and Discussions of Authenticity" focuses on Watsuji and criticizes his diminution of the critical powers of the individual, his ethics of "*nakayoshi*" (getting along), the absence of any real sociality in Watsuji (wherein people can actually construct new relations with strangers) and the general closedness of Watsuji's view of relation. Finally, Chapter 4, "Subject and/or *Shutai* and the Inscription of Cultural Difference" talks about the dangers of Watsuji's "transcendent position" especially in his theory of milieu, anxiety in the experience of cultural difference, and a full critique of Watsuji from the point of view of Jean-Luc Nancy. These themes will be discussed further in almost every chapter of this dissertation.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in Watsuji Tetsurô, and two new translations have been released: *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen* (2011) translated by Steve Bein, and *Pilgrimages to the Ancient Temples in Nara* (2012) translated by Nara Hiroshi. With these translations, I expect that more and more research on Watsuji will be carried out in English.

While my linguistic abilities are not sufficient for a close analysis of other western languages, let me briefly suggest the developments of Watsuji studies in French, German, Italian, and Spanish.² *Milieu* is by far Watsuji's most translated work: The German translation came out in 1992, a Spanish one in 2006, and an excellent translation in French by Augustin Berque and his team in 2011. Additionally, *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* is available in German (2005), and *Pilgrimages to the Ancient Temples in Italy* is available in Italian (2005).

While more translations are available in English, more full-length works are available in foreign languages. In German, Hans Peter Liederbach (2001) has a book on the relationship between Watsuji's thought and that of Heidegger. Also, Bianca Boteva-Richter (2009) has a book on methodological transfers in Watsuji, which examines topics like hermeneutics and dialectics from a cross-cultural context. In Italian, Oliviero Frattolillo (2013) has a book that introduces Watsuji's ethics of inter-being and intersubjective relationality. This growing number of translations and full-length works testifies to the rising awareness of Watsuji's importance as a thinker in our problems today.

² There is also some literature on Watsuji as well as a few translations in Chinese and Korean, but at present, I have no competency in these languages.

Examining the above, this dissertation can be positioned squarely between the two traditions of application and critique. On one hand, I have been inspired by the positive and comparative readings of Watsuji, particularly those by LaFleur and Maraldo. Like LaFleur, I see much promise in the Buddhist side of Watsuji as it connects to his systematic ethics. And like Maraldo, I concern myself, not with Watsuji in the past and within the context of Japan, but as a dialogue partner *in the present*, as I wrestle with the philosophical discourses that beset contemporary international society. On the other hand, I take the critical readings of Watsuji (particularly by Sakai and by Bellah) very seriously. The key problems I take up—the lack of singularity, statism, and cultural particularism—are in direct response to these critiques. Also, in a nod to this critical tradition, I am careful to avoid the pitfall of naïve readings of Watsuji by trying to cover as much of the *Watsuji Tetsurô Zenshû* (Collected Works, heretofore *WTZ*) as possible and by keeping the history of Japan and the history of Japanese philosophy in the background as I read Watsuji.

Thus, this dissertation hopes to fuse the positive and critical traditions of reading Watsuji through a broad and careful critical reading of Watsuji's texts coupled with a comparative and philosophical approach to his application. I also hope to fill in the conspicuous lacuna of a comprehensive and critical discussion of the *entirety of Watsuji's systematic ethics* that has been neglected in favor of broader overviews and narrower readings (of the first volume of *Ethics* or of *Milieu*).

4.2 In Japanese

Despite Watsuji's mixed reception in Japan, he is still one of the most well-known modern Japanese philosophers today. Many of his key works (*Ethics*, *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, *Milieu*, *Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit*, *The History of Japanese Ethical*

Thought, National Isolation, etc.) are still in print, and, as I have mentioned, he is one of the few interwar philosophers listed in high school textbooks. Because of this popularity, there are at least eight books that focus on Watsuji since the year 2000, and more than a dozen journal articles on Watsuji in the year 2013 alone.

Due to the difficulty in surveying such a vast range of publications, I have made use of Nishitani Kei's *Bunka to Kôkyôsei: Watsuji Rinrigaku no Saikôchiku* (Culture and Publicness: A Reconstruction of Watsuji's Ethics, 2013) which is, at the time of the writing of this dissertation, the newest book on Watsuji. Nishitani provides an extended summary of the related literature in Japanese in the chapter entitled "The Various Approaches to Watsuji's Ethics" (*Watsuji rinrigaku e no sho apurôchi*). I have followed and confirmed his leads and added to them as necessary.

Nishitani divides the research into eight main approaches. The first is the critiques of Watsuji from a Marxist standpoint. This approach begins as early as the 1930s, with Tosaka Jun's critique of *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* in his book *Nihon ideorogî ron* (1935). Among other things, Tosaka argued against Watsuji's attempt to criticize all theories of ethics using Japanese terminology (and words like "rinri") for this effectively makes Japan the measure of all ethical theory.³ This would set the tone for future critiques of Watsuji's Japanism. This critique was followed by Yamada Kô's *Watsuji Tetsurô ron* (1987), who criticized the excessive fixation on words and arbitrary etymologies found in Watsuji's hermeneutic method, and Watsuji's attempt to apply the notion of emptiness (*kû*) as a principle, which Kô saw as fundamentally impossible.⁴ Similarly, Tsuda

³ Nishitani Kei, *Bunka to Kôkyôsei: Watsuji Rinrigaku no Saikôchiku* (Kyoto: Kôyô shobô, 2013), 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Masao's *Watsuji Tetsurô kenkyû: Kaishakugaku, kokumin dôtoku, shakaishugi* (2001) critiques Watsuji's failure to create a system of national morals and his conflicted relationship with Marx and *The German Ideology*.⁵ Another important critique Tsuda offers is Watsuji's tendency to escape into idealistic fantasies of the perfect unity of the individual and the house (*ie*),⁶ a matter we will consider throughout this dissertation.

The second approach to Watsuji is from hermeneutics. Key works here are Shôji Kunio's *Watsuji Tetsurô no jitsuzô: Shisôshi no shiza ni yoru Watsuji zentaizô no kaiseki* (1998) and Kaneko Takezô's various critical essays. (Kaneko is also the author of many commentaries to the *WTZ*, particularly those on systematic ethics.) The main criticism that is presented here is one that is very relevant to this dissertation—that Watsuji tends to give absolute value to community, ignoring the possibility that a community—like a band of robbers—might be fundamentally unethical. This problem will become central in Chapter VI.⁷

A third approach to Watsuji looks at various critical considerations that attempt to strike a middle path between bashing Watsuji and blindly accepting his theories. Nishitani points out that most “Watsuji bashing” has come from Marxists, while analytic philosophers ignore Watsuji. Thus, it has fallen to scholars from history of thought and comparative studies to develop Watsuji studies.⁸ There are four key thinkers here. First, Ikimatsu Keizô wrote *Shisôshi no dôhyô: Kindai Nihon bunka no kyûmei to tenbô* (1965) in which he tries to grasp what was most unique in Watsuji's ethics—the turn toward

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

relationality (*aidagara*)—and attempts to see the value of Watsuji’s system as a whole. Similarly, Utsunomiya Yoshiaki wrote *Ningen no aida to rinri* (1980) where he analyses Watsuji’s notion of relationality and contrasts it with the philosophical idea of an “I-Thou” relationship. He ends up criticizing Watsuji’s model as one that tends toward statism and a total subservience of the individual to the whole. (We will discuss this in Chapters II and III.) Third, Iwasaki Takeo wrote *Rinrigaku* (1971) and pointed out Watsuji’s conflation of is and ought, and conflicts in Watsuji’s view of dialectics and stages (which I will discuss in Chapters VI and III respectively). Finally, the most important figure for Nishitani is Yuasa Yasuo—Watsuji’s disciple and author of what is, for many, the single best introduction to Watsuji: *Watsuji Tetsurô: Kindai Nihon tetsugaku no unmei* (1981). Yuasa discussed Watsuji’s *Ethics* as a systematic whole but at the same time, pointed out limitations in Watsuji: tendencies to prioritize totality, to ignore the singularity of religious experience, to overlook I-thou relations, to absolutize everydayness, and so on. Yuasa concludes with a view that while Watsuji effectively expresses traditional Japanese ethical views against modern ethical theory, Watsuji’s ethic was a “gigantic failure” that fell with the defeat of Japan.⁹

The fourth approach Nishitani discusses is the appraisal of Watsuji as a cultural philosopher (akin to Thomas Kasulis’ recent appraisal of Watsuji in various lectures on intimacy-oriented and integrity-oriented cultures). Here, he discusses Sakabe Megumi’s *Watsuji Tetsurô* (1986). While most of this concerns Watsuji’s theory of art and culture,

⁹ Ibid., 38-46.

it is interesting that Sakabe also points out the tendency of Watsuji to collapse is and ought, and to miss the good of the individual and the evils of society.¹⁰

The fifth approach Nishitani takes up is the critique of Watsuji from social philosophy, where he takes up Sakai Naoki, whom I have discussed previously. The sixth approach consists of the apologies—the defenses of Watsuji. For instance, Yoshizawa Denzaburô's *Watsuji Tetsurô no menboku* (1994) examines various facets of Watsuji's ethics—its debt to Windelband, its applicability to a wide range of philosophical questions, its shift to a relational view of ethics as *Sittlichkeit* (communal ethical life), its focus on the nation-state, and so forth. Another work is Ichikura Hirosuke's *Watsuji Tetsurô no shaken: Koji junrei, Rinrigaku, Katsura Rikkyû* (2005), which defends Watsuji's ethics as an attempt to reconcile the clash of Marxism and Japanism that raged fiercely during his time, and develop the tradition of philosophical *Anthropologie* from Kant and Heidegger. He sees Watsuji very positively as resolving everydayness and transcendence through a *dynamic* view of *aidagara* fueled by the dialectics of emptiness. (This is closely related to our discussion in Chapter VI.)¹¹

Seventh is a critique from literary studies (*bunkengaku*). Very recently, Koyasu Nobukuni's *Watsuji Rinrigaku o yomu: Mō hitotsu no "Kindai no chōkoku"* (2010) discussed Watsuji's connections with the discourse on "overcoming modernity," scathingly critiquing the arbitrariness of Watsuji's hermeneutics (while acknowledging the importance of his introduction of hermeneutics to Japan) and cutting down Watsuji's statist

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹¹ Ibid., 52-56.

and backward-looking dialectics. Much of these critiques resonate with those of Sakai and the negative side of Yuasa.¹²

Finally, we have other recent works on Watsuji: Sekiguchi Sumiko's *Kokumin dōtoku to jendā* (2007), Kumano Sumihiko's *Watsuji Tetsurō: Bunjin tetsugakusha no kiseki* (2009) and Makino Eiji, *Watsuji Tetsurō no kakikomi o miyo!: Watsuji Rinrigaku no Konnichiteki Igi* (2010) which present new angles in developing Watsuji's thought.

In a survey of all the articles written about Watsuji since 2010, I note five new directions in Watsuji research: First, there is a growing interest in the connections between Watsuji and the social sciences (sociology, geography, economics, etc.), as is evidenced in the work of Araki Masami (2010), Inukai Yuichi (2013), Ôshima Mario (2013), and Takano Hiroshi (2010). Second, there is a spate of research on the connections of Watsuji to German thought (like Dilthey, Gadamer, Hegel, Heidegger, Herder, Hölderlin, and others). We see this in Araki Natsuno (2013), Hamauzu Shinji (2012), Kaburaki Masahiko (2010), Makita Etsurō (2013), Sasaki Kazuya (2012), Takahashi Fumihiro (2011), Tano Takeo (2010), and Yamamoto Yoshitaka (2012). Third is a research trend toward examining Buddhist themes in Watsuji, which we see in Kuriyama Haruna (2014), Matsuo Nobuaki (2013), Ralph Müller (2010), and Sueki Fumihiko (2010). Fourth, many are examining Watsuji's connections with other Japanese thinkers, especially in the Kyoto School of Philosophy (particularly Nishida, Kuki, and Tanabe): See Kawai Hiroyoshi (2012), Matsuzaki Chika (2013), and Takeuchi Seiichi (2010). And fifth, scholars seem to be taking an interest in Watsuji's notions of home and family, as in Higaki Tatsuya (2012), Kimura Junji (2012), and Umaba Taishi and Kouchi Hiroshi (2013).

¹² Ibid., 56-58.

As with the non-Japanese literature, this dissertation can be placed alongside Nishitani Kei and the thinkers, such as Yuasa and Iwasaki, whom he mentions in the third group. Like these thinkers, I attempt to effect an internal critique that is balanced with an awareness of Watsuji's strengths. However, one distinct feature of this dissertation is that it does not attempt to pass any judgment on Watsuji as a Japanese philosopher—either as a success or a failure. Rather, it is interested in the application of Watsuji to contemporary concerns and discourses in global society.

This approach is quite unique, and none of the books discussed appear to focus directly on this. Some recent articles reflect a similar approach, such as two by Morimura Osamu, whose comparisons of Watsuji with Alphonso Lingis's idea of “the community of those who have nothing in common” and Erin McCarthy's “embodied ethics of care” will be taken up in Chapter II. Another example is Naitō Yoshio (2014) and his examination of the contemporary relevance of Watsuji's post-ontological approach. But as for full-length works, this dissertation could be described as similar to Sakai in that it applies Watsuji to a range of poststructural and transnational concerns, but in the *opposite direction* of seeing Watsuji's positive uses, akin to the apologists of Watsuji Tetsurō (particularly Ichikura). It is hoped that this uniqueness might be seen as a contribution to Watsuji studies, even in Japan. Furthermore, by focusing on the application of Watsuji to global discourses, this dissertation hopes to contribute to Japanese scholarship by providing suggestions as to how Watsuji scholars might internationalize the discourse on Watsuji (and other Japanese philosophers).

5 Outline of the Chapters

This work is divided into six main chapters.

Chapter I, “The Systematic Unity of Ethics,” is a summary of the main contours of Watsuji’s systematic ethical project and an analysis of its main contributions. I will examine the key works in his systematic period, beginning with *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations* and *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, where Watsuji lays out the dual-structures, terminology, methodology and philosophical positioning of his new approach to ethical theory. I will then continue to his systematic masterpiece *Ethics*. In analyzing volume one, I will discuss the key ideas of the dual-negative structure of individuality and totality, their unity in emptiness, their expression in space and time, and the ethical demand in truthful responses to trust. I will then proceed to the development of these ideas in volume two, where individuality and totality unfold through the lensing of various stages of private and public existence. I will then expound on the six main forms of human organization—families, local communities, economies, cultural communities, and the nation state. Proceeding to the final volume, I will examine how time and space are respectively concretized in history and milieu, and how these combine to form national existence and the ethics such an existence might entail. Having thus broadly surveyed the development of ideas across the key works of this period of Watsuji’s career, I will delve into his main contributions, and the unity and contradictions contained within these ideas.

Chapter II, “Relationality and Singularity,” discusses a key problem that emerges in the very core of Watsuji’s ideas: What are the fundamental limits of relationality (*ai-dagara*)? To what extent are we able to share in each other’s lives given our differences? I will begin with a close examination of Watsuji’s idea of relationality and the many facets of human interrelatedness. I will then proceed to Erin McCarthy’s positive appraisal of Watsuji’s relational core in relation to care ethics and feminist ethics. But, against this

positive reading, I will examine Watsuji's uneasy relationship with the postmodern/post-structural idea of *alterity*, and the excessive tendencies of his notion of relation that prevent a naïve integration of his thought with ethics of care. After drawing these problems out through some hints from poststructural philosophy (particularly Levinas and Nancy), I will return to Watsuji and explore the parts where Watsuji tries to maintain a sense of the *singularity* of the individual despite the fundamentality of relation—and try to see the full extent of Watsuji's resources in responding to the problem of relationality vs. singularity.

Chapter III, “The Balancing Act between Individuality and Totality,” discusses the *disruptions* in the systematic unity of the three volumes of *Ethics*, particularly surrounding the dual-structure of the individuality and communality of human existence. Here, I will examine how the interpretation of this structure shifts over the pre-war, war-time, and post-war volumes. In the first volume, double-negation is ambiguously explained as either an endless cycle that balances individuality and totality or a three-stage dialectic that privileges totality. There is also a very limited view of social change. In the second volume, the individual is largely subsumed beneath finite and exclusive totalities, and social change is restricted to advances in culture. But in the third volume, individuality is reinstated as that which guides social change by intuiting how the totality ought to be. Also, double-negation is reinterpreted as heading toward unity-in-difference. Having thus examined the shifts in Watsuji's view of the dual-structure, I will attempt to understand it in light of the historical context of World War II. Finally, I will consider a contemporary debate that is wrestling with this exact same question—liberalism vs. communitarianism—and explore John Maraldo's and Luke Dorsey's attempts to transcend this debate through Watsuji's ethical theory.

Chapter IV, “The Universal and the Particular in Global Ethics,” takes up the dual-structure as it moves at a higher level—the relationship between individual nations and their local histories with *world history*. Is global ethics a matter of universal norms that directly connect to individuals regardless of their historico-cultural specificity? Or is ethics a matter of relative and particular national morals? I will begin with an examination of the particular moment of *Ethics*—the attempt to situate relations in the body as it moves in space and time, and in a concrete environment with a shared history. I will then proceed to Watsuji’s view of the debate between universal morality and national morals in two earlier essays—first his defense of the former, then his defense of the latter. Through this, I will show Watsuji’s own unique approach to how universality and particularity might be unified. Finally, I will show how he tries to apply this in his view of international history and global ethics. I will end by analyzing the contemporary debates on global ethics (or global justice), focusing on the issue of moral relativism and cosmopolitanism, and suggesting how Watsuji might contribute to a new way of approaching these discourses.

The first four chapters focus on how Watsuji’s idea of emptiness might contribute to the debates between singularity and relationality, liberalism and communitarianism, and moral universalism and relativism. And so in Chapter V, “The Buddhist Roots of the Ethics of Emptiness,” I will take up this central idea of emptiness directly. Where does this idea come from? In this chapter, I will examine Watsuji’s “The Concept of ‘Dharma’ and the Dialectics of Emptiness in Buddhist Philosophy” and the lecture notes eventually published as *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*. In relation to primitive Buddhism, I will discuss Watsuji’s view of dharma and his unique reading of dependent arising. Auxiliary to that, I will take up the relationship that he sees between morality and wisdom.

Then, in relation to Mahāyāna Buddhism, I will study his fine-tuning of the concept of emptiness in Mādhyamika and Yogācāra Buddhism, where he details first the movement from phenomena to emptiness, then the reverse movement from emptiness to phenomena. Having thus detailed Watsuji's own Buddhist ethics and his view of emptiness, I will show how it connects to his systematic ethical project. I will show how these two projects are continuous in his focus on non-duality, negation, and emptiness, and how his appropriation of Buddhism is lensed through Hegel. But I will also examine three points in which these two projects are *discontinuous*: first, in his confusion on how to apply emptiness to individuality and totality; second, in the shift in the understanding of the non-duality of "is" and "ought;" and finally, in the clash between hermeneutics and transcendence.

Chapter VI, "Transcendence and Everydayness in Buddhist-Hermeneutic Ethics," takes up the gap between Watsuji's Buddhist ethics and his hermeneutic ethics and explores the academic and political significance of minding this gap. But beyond that, it examines the possibility of mending this gap, first, by highlighting parts of his systematic ethics that allow for a sense of critique, and second, by unmasking certain ideals within his purportedly neutral hermeneutics that allow for a more critically transcendent view of emptiness as an ideal. A key element here will be Watsuji's view of culture as "spiritual community" as is exemplified in his view of *renga* (linked-verse poetry). Having drawn out these possible syntheses, I will sketch a possible "Buddhist-hermeneutic model" of ethics which combines the strength of the two approaches. I will end by examining the contemporary discourse on Japanese Buddhism and social ethics, particularly those by Christopher Ives and James Mark Shields, and examine how Watsuji might contribute to the key question of transcendence and everydayness in Buddhist social ethics.

The general conclusion brings together the key points of this dissertation with a summary of what Watsuji was trying to accomplish in his systematic ethics, the contributions this has given and could give to contemporary discourses in global society, and the legitimate limitations of Watsuji's approach. Finally, I will show how all of the attempts to contribute to the various contemporary discourses are through *a single consistent approach* to Watsuji's systematic ethics, which highlights the idea of emptiness as destabilization and tensional unity of subject/object and individuality/totality. This will thus show how this usage of emptiness is able to address all of the above issues in a systematic way and how it suggests ways to overcome existing limitations in Watsuji's thought.

Chapter I.¹ The Systematic Unity of *Ethics*

In this chapter, I would like to begin with the following questions: First, what is the essence, the core idea of Watsuji's systematic ethical period? Second, how is this essence developed across the various publications of this period? In answering these, I wish to lay a foundation for the close reading of the limitations and possibilities for Watsuji's ethics, as well as its potential uses in comparative philosophy.

However, in order to answer these questions, it is necessary to extensively survey the key insights and flows between the following main works of this systematic period. He wrote two works that can be considered as preparatory to this period: *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations* (1935) and *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* (1934). Then of course we have the three volumes of *Ethics* (1937, 1942/46, 1949). Finally, there are several books that directly aimed to support this project: *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason* (1935), *Person and Humanity* (1938), *Confucius* (1938), *The Ethics of Political Ningen* (1948), and *The Pioneers of Modern Philosophy of History* (1950).

As we see from this list, Watsuji's systematic ethics is composed of five books with at least five supporting works—ten books spanning around two decades of Watsuji's career. Thus, knitting together the insights in these books is necessary in order to show

¹ An earlier version of this chapter has previously been published as "Concretizing an Ethics of Emptiness: The Succeeding Volumes of Watsuji Tetsurô's Ethics," *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East* 24:1 (2014), 82-101.

the systematic unity of his ethical project and to show the approach I take to his thought. Also, this summary is *particularly* important for an English publication, because among these books, *Milieu* and *Ethics I* are the only ones translated into English. As such, most studies on Watsuji in the Anglosphere tend to over-focus on these translated volumes, sometimes to the utter neglect of the other volumes of *Ethics* and Watsuji's other works.

In this chapter, I will trace the outlines of Watsuji's systematic ethical project. I will begin with the two preparatory works, then go rather carefully through *Ethics I, II, and III*. I will then give a brief summary of the auxiliary works. Finally, I will pull together what I see to be the essential elements of Watsuji's contribution.

1 Two Preparatory Works (1934, 1935)

The ideas that present themselves in Watsuji's *Ethics* had long been incubating. We see traces of it in his *Nietzsche Studies* (1913) and in his reminiscence of Natsume Sôseki in *Revival of Idols* (1918). Glimpses of his Buddhist dialectics began to emerge in his work on Dôgen (published in *Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit*, 1926) and in his dissertation on *The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism* (1927). But a milestone for Watsuji's systematic ethics was his trip to Europe in 1927-1928. These travels would occasion his reading of Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927), which he read shortly after its publication, and would greatly form his approach (at least as a foil to his arguments, as we shall see later). These would also inspire his writing of *Milieu*, which was written over a period of time, from 1929-1935.

1.1 Dualities in *Milieu*

Milieu is one of Watsuji's most popular works in Japan and in the Anglosphere. Some English-speaking scholars lament its popularity, calling *Milieu* a "philosophical lightweight." Certainly it is a rather freehand travel journal with philosophical ideas liberally sprinkled in. But David Dilworth suggests in "Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician" that *Fûdo* (*Milieu*) and *Ningen* form two pillars of Watsuji's thought. And I concur, for it is in *Milieu* that Watsuji clearly lays out the various dualities that his ethical project shall struggle to overcome.

The first duality that he tries to overcome is the duality of subject and object. He accomplishes this through his famous "phenomenology of the cold," where he points out that the cold is not "out there," an object that exists externally to the human being. For such would be an abstraction, separate from the cold that we *experience* when we shiver on a cold night. But the cold is not a mere subjective experience either, merely within the structures of consciousness. Watsuji writes:

The usual distinction between subject and object, or more particularly the distinction between "the cold" and "I" independently of each other, involves a certain misunderstanding. When we *feel* cold, we ourselves are already in the coldness of the outside air. That we come into relation with the cold means that we *are outside* in the cold. In this sense, our state is characterized by "*ex-sistere*" as Heidegger emphasizes, or, in our term, by "intentionality."²

This inseparability of subject and object would remain ever present in Watsuji's works, where he consistently emphasizes that all subjective, ideal matters are somehow mediated by the material: words, images, goods, architecture, climate, and so on. In the same way,

² Watsuji Tetsurô, *Fûdo: Ningengakuteki kôzatsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), 12 (3). かく見れば主観・客観の区別、従ってそれ自身単独に存立する「我々」と「寒気」との区別は一つの誤解である。寒さを感じるとき、我々自身はすでに外気の寒冷のもとに宿っている。我々自身が寒さにかかわるということは我々自身が寒さの中に出ているということにほかならぬのである。かかる意味で我々自身の有り方は、ハイデッガーが力説するように「外に出ている」(*ex-sistere*) ことを、従って志向性を、特徴とする。

the material, objective world always finds its way into human existence through its relationship with meaning, its hermeneutic significance.

From the beginning, Watsuji connected the tethering of subject and object with that of the individual and community. The cold is not something we relate with on our own. Rather, in feeling cold, we exchange (winter) greetings with other people. Entire communities develop material culture (agricultural practices, clothing, architecture) in relation to this cold. Thus, the cold is experienced both by the “I” as well as by the community—extending all the way into the past. Watsuji expresses this non-duality as a “dual-character” (*nijū seikaku*): “By ‘ningen’ I mean not the individual (anthrōpos, homo, homme, etc.) but a person both in this individual sense and at the same time people in society, the combination or the community of persons. This dual-character is the essential nature of *ningen*.”³

Just as the subject is always tied to the object, the individual is always tied to a community. Outside of Watsuji studies, this is usually referred to as “non-duality,” but Watsuji refers to this as a dual-structure or a dual-character, pointing out the tensional unity of these poles. And it is from these dual-structures that he develops the relationship of climate and history, and spirit and matter, which he concretely discusses as three climatic types—desert, meadow, and monsoon—whose material character are inseparable from the subjective-historical culture of man (hence the unity of climate and culture in the word “milieu”). The details of these climatic types are not our main concern here. But

³ Ibid., 18 (8). Translation emended. ここに人間と呼ばれるのは単に「人」(anthrōpos, homo, homme, man, Mensch)ではない。それは「人」でもあるが、しかし同時に人々の結合あるいは共同態としての社会でもある。人間のこの二重性格が人間の根本的性格である。

for now let us keep in mind these various dual-structures in Watsuji's other preparatory work.

1.2 Ethics as the Study of Ningen (1934)

Watsuji's development of the theoretical/systematic side of his view of the human being and ethics began in earnest in 1931, when he was promoted to the position of Professor of Ethics at Kyoto Imperial University. In that year, he wrote four key essays: "Person and Humanity in Kant," "The Concept of 'Dharma' in Buddhist Philosophy and the Dialectics of Emptiness," "Universal Morality and National Morals," and "Ethics."⁴ All of these essays would eventually become key parts of Watsuji's systematic project. (We will briefly discuss the Kant essay toward the end of this chapter; the second essay on Buddhism will form a major part of our discussion in Chapter V; and the essay on universal and national morality will be analyzed in Chapter IV.)

The last essay, "Ethics," is of particular importance to us here. It was this essay in 1931 that would be developed in 1934 into the book *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* (1934), just as Watsuji was moving to a post in Tokyo Imperial University. In a sense, we see in this book the culmination of Watsuji's entire professorship at Kyoto (and the book is fittingly dedicated to his benefactor, Nishida Kitarô). This book would eventually become one of his most famous books in Japan, as the first full work of his systematic ethics.

Ethics as the Study of Ningen was Watsuji's direct prolegomena to *Ethics*. This is where he sought to introduce the key idea and terminology of his project, its position in

⁴ Kaneko Takezô's commentary, in *WTZ11*, 456.

response to the history of western ethics, and its primary methodological concerns. Let us begin with his terminology.

1.3 Etymologies

At the beginning of this work, Watsuji sought to etymologically define various key Japanese expressions. I focus on three: *rinri*, *ningen* and *sonzai*. These etymologies creatively express Watsuji's own vision for what ethics fundamentally is and ought to be.

For the first word: “*Rinri*, as the basis of the existence of human groups, is that which is realized in various communities. It is the way (*michi*) of the relationships of people, [its] order; and it is because this exists that relationships are made possible.”⁵ Here, we see that Watsuji's approach is focused not on individual *Moralität* but the order of communities formed by relational human beings. Thus while I will be translating *rinri* as “ethics,” and its analog, *rinrigaku* as “the study of ethics” or merely “ethics,” we must remember that it contains a much more social angle similar to the German *Sittlichkeit*, which the English word lacks.

The second word, *ningen*, is something that is often discussed in the literature on Watsuji, and it means self, other, a person, and people (plural). Watsuji stresses the character for *gen* or *aida*, pointing out that *ningen* is “between/amongst people” (*hito no aida*).⁶ It is treacherous to translate this word, so I will keep it untranslated.

⁵ *WTZ9*, 12-13. 倫理とは人間共同態の存在根底として、種々の共同態に実現せられるものである。それは人々の間柄の道であり、秩序であって、それあるがゆえに間柄が可能にせられる。

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

The third word, *sonzai*, can be translated as existence. But I will often leave it untranslated because Watsuji himself takes great pains to distinguish *sonzai* from *Sein*, pointing out how *sonzai* emphasizes being in relationships in both a spatial manner (of dwelling) and a temporal manner (of enduring). Together, *ningen sonzai* can thus be translated as “human existence”—but with a strong focus on the dual-structures of individuality and totality, spatiality and temporality, milieuity and historicity.

These three etymologies seem to highlight the strongly local, “Japanese” character of Watsuji’s supposedly universal ethics. This would become a point of contention for critics like Tosaka Jun, who would argue that this is tantamount to imposing a Japanese worldview (and an etymologically arbitrary one at that) upon the world. (We will examine this problem of universality and particularity further in Chapter IV.) But other scholars took this more positively. For instance, Kumano Sumihiko sees Watsuji as a key figure in supporting the move to do philosophy in everyday Japanese, writing in a style that was much more accessible than most of his contemporaries.⁷

Regardless of whether or not these etymologies are faithful to the actual Japanese meanings or how they resonated with the Japanese readers at that time, these etymologies express what Watsuji himself perceives ethics to be, and what he sees it as fundamentally concerned with—the study of *ningen sonzai* and its structures. In *ningen sonzai*, he sought not only the actuality of what human existence *is*, but also what it *ought to be*.

1.4 The History of Western Ethics

⁷ Kumano Sumihiko, *Nihon tetsugaku shôshi: Kindai 100 nen no 20 hen* (Tokyo: Chûkôshinsho, 2009), 154-157.

Watsuji situated ethics as a study of *ningen sonzai* within the tradition of western ethics. Many western commentators focus on Watsuji's "hostility" towards western ethics, but this tends to ignore his indebtedness to them. We see a more balanced picture in Watsuji's own very positive views on Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, and Karl Marx. Watsuji's reading of Aristotle focuses on the unity of ethics and politics, where the virtues of the individual are fundamentally one with political life and citizenship. He sees this as one of his sources for the dual-structure of individuality and totality.⁸ From Kant, Watsuji takes the idea of *Anthropologie (ningengaku)*, and the interplays of man as phenomenon and man as noumenon, or man as object vs. man as subject.⁹ While Watsuji has a very positive view of Kant and even reads the categorical imperative as an expression of the dual-structure of *ningen sonzai* (where a person is both a means and an end), he does see the beginnings of individualism in Kant and tries to use the Neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen as a corrective for this. The third key figure, Hegel, is a star for Watsuji; he had been lecturing on Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* in Tokyo Imperial University since 1935.¹⁰ He sees in Hegel the return of the ideal of community after a long period of individualism in Western thought. He also discusses Hegel more extensively than any other western philosopher, focusing on Hegel's ideas of absolute totality, negation, and self-awareness which were to become cornerstones of Watsuji's own approach.¹¹ (I will discuss this in detail in Chapter V.) He is critical of Hegel's turn to religion, and his

⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁰ Katsube Mitake, *Watsuji rinrigaku nôto* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 1979), 1-2.

¹¹ *WTZ9*, 77-100.

treatment of Ludwig Feuerbach and Marx are largely a corrective of this. Watsuji's reading of Marx is particularly interesting. He sees Marx as one of the greatest champions of *Sittlichkeit* and communal man. What he particularly highlights in Marx is the latter's materialism. Not materialistic reductionism, but a materialism that sees *ningen sonzai* as embedded in practical and embodied relationships.¹²

Watsuji had mentioned the problem of idealism vs. materialism in *Milieu*, and he highlighted this in his essay on "Ethics." We still see him trying to draw the same balance in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*—between the idealist components of categorical imperative, absolute totality, and self-awareness, and the materialist components of life in the polis, and the embodied, practical life therein. Thus, while he has his criticisms here, we see that Watsuji himself owed a lot to western ethics, and that his ideas of the dual-structure, *ningengaku*, absolute totality, and practical interconnections through acts (*jissenteki kôiteki renkan*) are actually inspired by Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Marx.

1.5 Methodology

Another key figure that greatly impressed Watsuji is Heidegger. We see that *Being and Time* casts a very large shadow in the way Watsuji discusses *how* to study *ningen sonzai*. He gives four major qualifications to the method of *ningen no gaku*: First, on the question of *ningen*: Questioning (or study, as in *gaku*) is a *practical way of Being*. But unlike Heidegger's conception of such, it is not merely the individual *Dasein* that questions but

¹² Ibid., 120-122.

rather *ningen* as both communal (the community of questioners) and individual (the individual questioner).¹³ Second, on *ningen* as questioned: In ethics as the study of *ningen sonzai*, *ningen* is asking about *ningen*—the questioner and the questioned, the subject and the object, are one.¹⁴ Thus, unlike in Heidegger, the fundamental question, first philosophy, is not ontology but ethics. Third, as a science (*gaku*), ethics (*rinrigaku*) has to make meaningful statements on what ethical life (*rinri*) is, and thus “objectively” explicate the ways of being (*sonzai no shikata*) that allow *ningen* to be *ningen*.¹⁵ But how does one make objective statements on *ningen* that is a practical subject, without reducing it to a mere passive object? This leads to the fourth qualification: Watsuji suggests that the only way to *ningen* is through the *expressions* of *ningen sonzai*: tools, material culture, language, in which subjective *ningen* becomes objectively manifest. Through an expression of these external articulations of human existence, taken not as mere objective facts but as expressions of the subjective interconnections that comprise our existence as *ningen*, we can thus understand and make explicit the being that we are.¹⁶

His shift from “experiences” to “expressions” has a double importance. Expressions are by their very nature inter-personal: they manifest the relational existence of *ningen* and the possibility of understanding them show an implicit relation between the one who expresses and the one who perceives the expression.¹⁷ This manifestation has the vital importance of externalizing relational *ningen* and thus allowing *ningen* to become self-

¹³ Ibid., 130-131.

¹⁴ Ibid., 136-138.

¹⁵ Ibid., 142-143.

¹⁶ Ibid., 154-157.

¹⁷ Ibid., 143-145.

aware. This indicates a shift from Heidegger's "phenomenology," which is largely individual, to a "hermeneutic" approach that takes into account the social dimension. Furthermore, it represents an integration of the two dual-structures of *Milieu* and their development: the unity of individuality and totality are expressed not merely subjectively but objectively as well—that is, through external material *expressions* that are intersubjectively meaningful.

These shifts bring Watsuji closer to Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutics as well as sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Gabriel Tarde. Watsuji acknowledges that these thinkers shaped his approach to the social dimension of ethical life. However, he does not accept sociology wholesale, because he wishes to take the data of social sciences not as objectified expressions, but as revelatory of subjective *ningen sonzai*.¹⁸

Thus, we see here that Watsuji was influenced by a great range of contemporary German thought and tried to synthesize a diversity of approaches while at the same time maintaining a commitment to his fundamental view of what the project of ethics should be.

Recapitulation

In *Milieu*, Watsuji first introduces the dual-characteristics of human existence: subject/object and individual/communal. In *Ethics as a Study of Ningen*, Watsuji picks up on these ideas and combines them with an attempt to retrieve the sense of the communal in ethical life. He thus develops the terminology of ethics (*rinrigaku*) as a study of *ningen sonzai* that is individual-communal and spatio-temporal and situates this view within the

¹⁸ Ibid., 154-167.

history of western ethical thought, between the traditions of idealism and materialism and individualism and groupism. Finally, he develops a method for ethics that focuses on the subjective-objective expressions of *ningen* in *ningen*'s authentic return to itself, combining the insights of German philosophy with social science.

2 *Ethics I* (1937)

From 1937 to 1949, a twelve-year period spanning Watsuji's entire stay at Tokyo Imperial University and the drama of wartime Japan, he would pick up this project that he first began in 1931 and develop it in a three-volume magnum opus simply entitled *Ethics* (*Rinrigaku*).

It is important to note that these three volumes form a systematic whole, as Kaneko Takezô suggests. In the introduction of *Ethics I*, Watsuji announces the structure of his future project: Volume one would examine the fundamental structure of *ningen sonzai*: individuality/totality, spatiality/temporality and privateness/publicness. These structures would be concretized in a theory of ethical action, trust, and truth. Volume two would examine the stage-wise progression of human relations—what he called *sittliche* organizations (*jinrinteki soshiki*): family, local community, economic organization, cultural community, and the state. In each of these stages, we would find the various virtues of trust and truth expressed by name. Volume three would examine the development of the spatio-temporality of *sonzai* as history and milieu. On the basis of this, he would reexamine the idea of national morals that he had written on back in 1931.¹⁹ As we will see in this chapter, he was able to stick to this basic plan for the most part.

¹⁹ WTZ10, 26-31 (22-27).

2.1 Practical Interconnections through Acts

One idea that Watsuji had been developing since *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* but was only fully emphasized in *Ethics I* is that of the “practical interconnection through acts” (*jissenteki kôiteki renkan*). This concept is the developed form of the unity of subject and object first presented in *Milieu*. In this interconnection, Watsuji tries to overcome the distinction of a knowing subject and a known object by focusing on the subject as *shutai*, an acting subject that thus always finds itself already in relation with the object. We find this not only in Kant’s idea of practical reason, but also in Heidegger’s idea of intentionality, and this explains the “practical” in “practical interconnections through acts.”

However, Watsuji tries to overcome Kant and Heidegger by pointing out that the subject here cannot merely be individual, for our agency is always shaped by other subjects and our relationships with them. Thus, the subject is *ningen* and not merely individual *Dasein*. Subjects act as shaped by relationships, and these acts in turn shape relationships. Thus, subjectivity is always found in an interconnection that is sustained by acts. Putting it all together, “practical interconnection through acts” refers to the relational existence (*aidagarateki sonzai*), wherein each acting subject (in unity with objects) is interconnected with other subjects through objective acts.²⁰

2.2 The Negative Dual-Structure and Ethics of Emptiness

²⁰ See *Ibid.*, 33-37 (31-34) and *WTZ9*, 134-142.

The above concept shows the complex intermingling of the facets of individuality and totality. On the basis of the hermeneutic approach to ethics, Watsuji shared everyday experiences in order to seek out the ground of these two facets. In seeking out the ground of individuality, he points out that most of the things we consider to “define” the individual—the demarcation of the body, the individuality of sensations, consciousness, or feelings—cannot sufficiently serve as a barrier between persons. Rather, we see that all of these elements of individuality are influenced by relationships and are actually part of how we relate with others, part of the betweenness (*aidagara*) that forms our point of departure in everyday life. He points out that individuality is not something that exists on its own but that it is *empty* (*kû*), and the only way to apprehend a sense of individuality is to actively negate communal aspects in order to differentiate the individual from the community.²¹

However, the same is true for totality. Watsuji points out that even while a whole may be greater than the sum of its parts, a community depends on its members—their existence, participation, and commitment. Consequently, Watsuji states that a community has no independent existence either, and, being empty, merely exists by “negating” the separateness of individual members by gathering them into the whole.²²

Watsuji sees *both* individuality and totality as necessary for human existence, but, at the same time, each exists merely as the negation of the other. They thus form a *negative dual-structure* and are unified by the very principle of absolute negativity (*zettai*

²¹ *WTZ10*, Ch. 1.1 (Everyday Facts as a Point of Departure) and 1.2 (The Individualist Moment in *Ningen Sonzai*).

²² *Ibid.*, Ch. 1.3 (The Total [Communal] Moment in *Ningen Sonzai*).

hiteisei), which he also refers to as absolute emptiness (*zettai kû*). It is this that Watsuji declares to be the fundamental law of ethics:

The negative structure of a human being is, as we said previously, the *fundamental law* (*konponteki rihô*) that renders a human being capable of continuously forming itself. Were we to deviate from this law, we would cease to exist. Therefore, this law is the basis of a human being. At the outset, we prescribed the ground of human community, namely, the *law of human being*, as ethics. Therefore, we can assert that this fundamental law is *basic ethics* (*konpon rinri*). Basic ethics is the basic principle of ethics. We can describe the basic principle of ethics in terms of “the movement in which absolute negativity returns back to itself through negation.”²³

This movement of the self-return of absolute negativity is described as the back and forth movement between individuality and totality, in which individuality negates totality in order to realize its own will and actions, and in which this individuality is further negated in a return to communal existence. Through this movement of negation, absolute negativity/emptiness is realized in ethical life.²⁴

2.3 Space and Time

Watsuji tries to further concretize this view of ethics as double-negation, as separation and unification, by connecting it with the ideas of space and time. He begins by pointing out that each totality has an aspect of privacy and an aspect of publicness: “In contrast with privacy, publicity signifies a community that is larger than and exists outside of privacy’s limit. Various forms of the public are, in turn, capable of privacy, in contrast with the larger community, which exists beyond them.”²⁵ This shows that each totality has an inside and an outside and is thus finite. This finitude is not only a metaphysical

²³ Ibid., 125 (119). Translation emended.

²⁴ Ibid., 26-27 (23).

²⁵ Ibid., 155 (147).

finitude, but a finitude in the space and time in which the movements of separation and unification occur within the field of practical interconnections of acts.

In his discussion of space and time, Watsuji uses the examples of transportation and communication to show how the relationship between embodied beings necessarily traverses space and thus requires movements (of bodies and of “embodied” information) across geographical space. The movement of unification and individuation in the negative dual-structure are carried out by bodies interacting in geographic space. Similarly, these examples show a structure of intersubjective temporality, where the past is the given context of relationships to which we respond, and where the future is the possible forms of relationality that we aim toward in our present actions. He thus presents a view of human relationships as grounded in space and time, and simultaneously argues for space and time as not merely objective or subjective but intersubjective.²⁶

2.4 Trust and Truthfulness

With the inseparability of individuality/totality, subject/object, and space/time, Watsuji has prepared the way for a general theory of ethical acts. He points out that in examining ethical acts, we are concerned not merely with individual will, intention, or consciousness, but with the spatial relationship between embodied subjects, and the relational temporality that forms the directionality of an act. He thus criticizes the tendency of western ethics to “extract a fragment or a horizontal section from the systematic relation of acts, thereby

²⁶ Ibid., Ch. 2.2 (The Spatiality of *Ningen Sonzai*) and 2.3 (The Temporality of *Ningen Sonzai*).

eliminating human relationships, and then to deal with it as an activity of individual consciousness, simplified as much as possible.”²⁷ Against this, he suggests the need to see an action within a manifold of spatio-temporal connections within a complex system that is found within each practical interconnection of acts.

Furthermore, these acts are not responses to universal reason or toward universal ends, but responses to the concrete call of trust found in social situations. He sees this trust, which is present in varying degrees in every social situation, as grounded not merely in individual goodness nor in social law, but rather, “The ground of trust consists exactly in the movement of the multiplication/unification of subjects through the path of negation.”²⁸ Similarly, the response to trust is truthfulness (*shinjitsu, makoto*), which is not merely the slavish obedience to social convention nor purely an obedience to private morality, but “*makoto* as an attitude assumed in response to trust consists of the realization of socio-ethical unity via the path of negation and hence reveals the authentic feature of *ningen sonzai*.”²⁹ The truthful response to trust is thus the concrete universal form of fundamental ethics, which Watsuji claims holds true in any human society, despite the varying ways in which trust relations might form in different cultures.

Recapitulation

²⁷ Ibid., 256 (244).

²⁸ Ibid., 283 (269).

²⁹ Ibid., 290 (276).

In *Ethics I*, Watsuji picks up where he left off in the preparatory works and develops the hermeneutic method of ethics into the fundamental law of *ningen sonzai*, in which absolute negativity forms the ground for the mutual negation of individuality and totality. The concretization of the movement of negation in space and time, and trust and truth make for a vision of ethics that is not merely about individual reason or abstract ideals, but one that is focused on a much more comprehensive view of *ningen sonzai* as situated in concrete, embodied, and dynamic trust relations. He thus develops the original insight from *Milieu* of the unity of subject and object in climate and history into the structure of ethics within practical interconnections.

A lot of English-speaking researchers have shown interest in these insights since the publication of this volume in English in 1996, thanks to the efforts of Robert E. Carter and Yamamoto Seisaku. However, as suggested in Watsuji's introduction, the first volume is but a fraction of his larger project; it is necessary to proceed to the concrete development of his ethics—in the various levels of human communities, and in the geographic and historical expanse of the human world.

3 *Ethics II* (1942, 1946)

The second volume of *Ethics* came around five years after the first. In this volume, Watsuji attempts to further concretize his discussion on the dual-structure of *ningen* and its dialectic development, which had been theoretically analyzed in the first volume. First, he details the principle of the concrete development of the negative relationship of private and public existence. Second, he shows how this unfolds in families, local communities, economies, cultural communities, and nation-states.

3.1 The Dialectic of Private and Public Existence

The key concept of the entire second volume is *jinrin*, which is Watsuji's translation for Hegel's term *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life, inter-human ethics). *Sittlichkeit* refers to ethics as it is lived in an inter-human manner, as distinct from *Moralität*, which is merely private, individual ethics. He devotes the second volume to analyzing *sittliche* organizations (*jinrinteki soshiki*). However, these organizations are the unfolding of the dialectic of private and public existence.

Private and public existence were first discussed in *Ethics I*, and he develops these ideas here. Watsuji points out that there is no such thing as an absolutely private existence—an essential solitude (like in the singularity of death) which cannot overlap with others. Rather than an essential solitude, privacy is the *refusal* of the participation of others. While privacy can manifest negatively in isolating an individual, this refusal functions positively in every stage of inter-human ethical organization. For instance, the family is exclusive in that non-family members cannot enter into this relationship. A state differentiates itself from other states. Each level of community closes itself off to higher levels of organization and other groups. As such, privacy is no more than an aspect or function of a community, by which it establishes itself and its boundaries. He expresses this and its relation to the flow of his discussion as follows:

It is clear that private existence is a mode of communal existence, as the state of privation (*ketsujotai*) of publicness. Communal existence realizes (*jitsugen suru*) itself through private existence. If that is the case, then we can trace the various stages of the realization of communal existence by tracing the various stages of private existence.³⁰

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 334. 私的存在が公共性の欠如態として共同存在の一つの様態にほかならぬことを明らかにした。共同存在は私的存在たることを通じて己れを実現するのである。しからば我々は私的存在のさまざまな段階をたどることによって共同存在の実現段階をもたどることができるだろう。

What we see here is a dialectic of private and public existence. Private existence realizes public existence by negating itself. But the public formed by this negation is private with respect to higher levels of organization and thus a *finite* totality, which must be negated further to form higher levels of organization.

This dialectic manifests as the following stages: families, local communities, economic systems, cultural communities, and nation-states. We can understand these stages as growing networks of practical interconnections through acts, where embodied subjects relate with each other in particular ways and are governed by particular trust relations. Each network will thus have its own “virtues,” which are the expressions of truthfulness in response to the particular demands of trust. Let us examine these stages and the manifestations of ethics within.

3.2 The Family

Watsuji begins his discussion of the family with the couple (husband and wife), which for him is the smallest self-sustaining unit of human existence. The couple is characterized by two demands: one for total participation, and one for total exclusivity. Total giving of self in body and mind allows the couple to completely transcend themselves and become one person, but this is made possible only by excluding others from this relationship. It is this very privacy *surrounding* the couple that allows the privacy *between* them to dissolve.³¹

What we see here is an expression of the dialectical relationship of individuality and totality. The individuality of husband and wife must be negated in order for them to

³¹ Watsuji discusses this extensively in *Ibid.*, 350-370.

fuse in total participation into each other's existence. But at the same time, this negation of individuality is a negation of totality in negating the participation of others outside the couple. It is within this finite totality that the virtues of marital life—fidelity, chastity, and marital harmony—can be expressed.

Watsuji's discussion progresses to the three-person relationship of father-mother-child, which further sublates the privacy of the couple to form a higher level of public existence. He also analyzes the relationship of siblings, where the privacy of several three-person relationships is sublated for a relationship between the siblings. This relationship is mediated by the shared love between the children and their parents, which in turn mediates the love that they have for each other.

The key idea we pick up from Watsuji here, which will continue throughout the other levels of ethical organization, is the importance of *mediation*. Relationships are mediated. The husband-wife relation is mediated by none other than *everything*—every aspect of the inner and outer life of each. The relationship of each pair in a three-person relationship is mediated by the third. For instance, the mother-father relationship is mediated by the child. The relationship of siblings is mediated primarily by a shared love for their parents, but also other shared cultural elements. And the relationship of relatives with each other is mediated by shared life events that bind them to each other.

Mediating elements are concrete and finite; therefore, they unify those who share it while excluding those who do not. Thus, the dialectic of private and public existence always involves negating what is private (un-shared media) in order to participate in a public via a shared medium. This public is in turn still private if seen vis-à-vis larger spheres of publicness. We can see this in the local community, economy, cultural community, and state as well. This can be understood as extending from the idea of practical

interconnections through acts, where the objective character of practical relations makes interconnections finite and thus limited and exclusive.

3.3 The Local Community

The local/regional community sublates the privacy of the family's blood ties and sexual intimacy in order to raise it to a higher level of publicness. This level of ethical organization is mediated by the land people share and the labor they carry out upon it. However, despite having transcended the blood ties and sexual ties of the family, the local community is still exclusive: people share a way of life and this shared way of life excludes those who belong to other localities and do not share in this way of life.³²

The ethical virtues in this level of human organization are becoming a full-fledged member of society (*ichinin mae ni naru*), fraternité (*hakuai*), and consideration (*kokorozukai*). I find the third virtue particularly interesting, because it is an attitude of restraining one's private impulses (favoritism toward one's family, egoistic interests, one's private willfulness) in a public situation, and through an attitude focused on common interests, making space for the concerns of other members of the local community, while at the same time taking care not to intrude on the privacy of others.³³ This virtue shows another facet of the dialectic of private and public existence which Watsuji is clarifying for the first time: private existence is both negated but at the same time preserved in a higher level of public existence. As such, the sublation (*Aufhebung*, *shiyô*) of the family includes both the senses of *elevare* and *abolere* in its superseding, as well as *conservare* in the

³² Ibid., 460-461.

³³ Ibid., 462-468.

respect shown toward it.³⁴ While Watsuji has yet to make it clear at this point of the discussion, he will eventually point out in his discussion of the state that every level of private existence is maintained while it is superseded.

3.4 The Economic System

Watsuji's view of economics is important because it is his key point of difference with Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, which this volume is otherwise structurally very similar to. While Hegel viewed civil society as an intermediate position between the family and the state, where civil society is an egotistic "system of desires" wherein the individual pursues his own interests, Watsuji begins his view of economics by refuting the very idea of *homo economicus*—an individual who acts aiming only toward the fulfillment of his own desires.³⁵ While modern economics begins with this presupposition and reduces production and trade relations to the pursuit of utility, Watsuji does not think that this shows the real story of the human relations behind economic activity.

For a more insightful view into the humanness of economic relations, Watsuji relies almost entirely on the work of the anthropologist Malinowski, particularly *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). What Watsuji finds in the primitive economics of the Trobriand people on the Kiriwina Islands (near Papua New Guinea) is the essence of a *relational* economics—building human bonds through products, both within a community and beyond.³⁶ As such, labor is not merely for oneself, but in one's caring for one's

³⁴ I draw much inspiration from Lukas Kaelin, *Strong Family, Weak State: Hegel's Political Philosophy and the Filipino Family* (Metro Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2012), 39-41.

³⁵ *WTZ10*, 469-471.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 471-481.

family. Moreover, labor is not merely for compensation but is essentially a service for a potential other (the customer), and like a gift, this gift is repaid (with money, in the case of modern economics). Watsuji thus sees products as a medium for *mutual service* between producers and consumers and the exchange of which not merely a mutual using of the other for one's own ends.³⁷

However, while Watsuji thinks that this relational essence of economics is still present in the modern world, he does see a great danger in economic life, as the modern view of economics becomes more and more the actual reality. People are beginning to see relationships and ethics as a mere means to utility, and every act willed by man is somehow reduced to man's selfish interests. Watsuji sees utilitarianism as complicit here, and he singles out Jeremy Bentham as an example of this.³⁸ Watsuji bitterly criticizes the coopting of ethics using his take on Max Scheler's *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau des Moralen* and Ferdinand Tönnies' theory of *Gemeinschaft und Gessellschaft*. But in this critique, what he calls for is not an abolition of the modern economic system but a restoration of its essential relational task.

Unlike local communities or nation-states, economies are not so much static communities as they are *flows* of human relations that have the potential to connect human beings in both inhuman and human ways. This view of ethics will become central in the third volume of *Ethics*.

A brief side-note here. One of the things that Sakai Naoki criticizes is Watsuji's refusal of materiality:

³⁷ Ibid., 485-486.

³⁸ Ibid., 491-503.

Despite Watsuji's emphasis on sensuous and human activity, he did not see much of a problem in allying the sort of praxis thematically dealt with in *The German Ideology* with the basically Kantian notion of praxis. Consequently, although he coined one of the main philosophemes in his *Ethics*, *kô-i-teki jissen renkan* or "practical relationality in [social] action" after Heidegger's conception of "equipment," almost no attention is paid to social relations that are mediated by equipment. . . . What one might refer to as the materiality of the social is deliberately excluded in his ethics.³⁹

While I generally agree with many of Sakai's points, I have to disagree with this one. As we have seen above, all human networks and particularly regional and economic human interconnections have a *clearly* material character. As I have pointed out in the two subsections above, Watsuji argues that our relationships are tied to our tools, our shared labors on the land, and our shared response to our environment. Here, Watsuji is developing the intuition he first had in *Milieu*, and I think this materiality is rather central in Watsuji's thought. But despite the Marxist elements of this idea, perhaps what a Marxist critique might suggest is that Watsuji's discussion of economics and materiality completely avoids the notion of *class*. Thus, the relations of domination and exploitation that occur in our relationship with economic goods and labor seem to be completely invisible—which may have led to Sakai's accusations of Watsuji's "spiritualism."

3.5 Cultural Community

The sharing of products in economic systems paves the way for the sharing of culture across multiple localities. Watsuji indicates four domains of culture—language, art, scholarship, and religion—each expressing and mediating the togetherness of a finite nation in a particular way.

³⁹ Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 79.

Language is the most essential domain of culture, whose “communification” is part of art, scholarship, and religion as well. Watsuji begins by pointing to us that, in our interactions with others, we already have a mutual understanding that we share with them. Language is merely an expression of this mutual understanding, which can be seen in cases where communication is more subtle—finishing each other’s sentences, leaving things half-said, or leaving things unsaid altogether.⁴⁰ But this mutual understanding has a restricted range, and for Watsuji, it is language that forms the limits of an ethnic nation and divides one nation from another in a manner that not even translation or multi-linguality can overcome.⁴¹ Language thus expresses and mediates the finite whole of a nation and demarcates it from other nations.

Similarly, Watsuji views art as something that expresses “formless form,” the emptiness that is the core principle of shared existence. It expresses the very absolute totality that grounds community, and can thus move people and become an enduring emblem of a spiritual community—for example, a classic like Homer’s poems. But, yet again, despite being expressive of a universally human principle, art is limited to an ethnos by its language and style and is hence finite and culturally specific.⁴²

Scholarship/*scientia* (*gakumon*) is the systematic and methodic pursuit of knowledge, which reflects the sociality of cognition—all learning and *noesis* is in relation to the *noesis* of other people in society and history. Interestingly, Watsuji acknowledges the critical and creative power of individuals most clearly in scholarship, because the

⁴⁰ *WTZ10*, 528-532.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 532-555.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 540-549.

individual does not merely participate in shared knowledge but contributes something novel to it through his/her own critical thinking.⁴³

Last, Watsuji grasps religion as part of culture, seeing the individual's direct relationship with the absolute as a form of cultural production, and manifest in cultural products that are finite and shared in a finite community. But religion plays a special role in that it is a direct, self-conscious return to the absolute that is the origin and telos of human existence.⁴⁴ However, it is important to note that for Watsuji, while the absolute is universal, the relationship with the absolute has a finite and thus particular form. Hence, as with any facet of culture, there is no such thing as universal religion, and Watsuji warns us of the danger of absolutizing religion as no more than an attempt to forcibly impose as absolute something that is merely particular.⁴⁵ This has been a perennial concern for Watsuji, and we see it as early as in his *Shamon Dôgen*.⁴⁶

As we have seen above, language, art, scholarship, and religion all express and mediate the togetherness of people across local communities. Watsuji calls those who share in culture as simply “friends” (*yûjin*). Friends, by sharing in the way they see the world, form a *spiritual community* that transcends filial and regional ties. But, despite its inclusivity, culture is still limited by a shared landmass and climate, in which a particular

⁴³ Ibid., 549-551.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 559-560.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 559-561.

⁴⁶ See Watsuji Tetsurô, *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen*, trans. Steve Bein (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2011), Chapter 1.

For my comments on this, see Anton Luis Sevilla, “Book Review of *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen*.” In *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013). 239-246.

culture can spread and have a shared relevance. As such, culture is now divided into nation-states, and is restricted to their communities of shared land and language.⁴⁷

For Watsuji, the spiritual community is the most inclusive possible mediated community, and it is only within the possibility for entering this community that one can be seen as a person. He takes up the old formulation of the person as *zoon logon echon* (ζῷον λόγον ἔχον) and points out that only one who can speak *what I can acknowledge to be language*, that is, a member of my linguistic/cultural community, can be a person to me.⁴⁸ He points out the proof in the system of slavery: When the Americans first instituted human rights, it never occurred to them that it was in direct contradiction with their practice of slavery, simply because they did not see black people as human.⁴⁹ Watsuji is by no means condoning slavery and colonial practices—he criticizes these things heavily. But he argues that people of another ethnos can only be persons if we allow them to be persons in their own ethnos. He thus promotes a mutual respect of separate cultures and denies the possibility of a universal culture of humanity.

3.6 The State

His view on cultural particularity carries over to his discussion of the state, where he insists that a *completely inclusive* community of all humankind has never existed—and perhaps never will, for absolute totality shows itself only through finite relative totalities.

⁴⁷ WTZ10, 582-584.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 588-590.

⁴⁹ WTZ11, 417-418. These comments were omitted from the revised version.

As such, a community of humankind must be one that brings nations together *while maintaining their difference*.⁵⁰ This will become a key theme in *Ethics III*.

Watsuji sees the state as the highest possible *Gemeinschaft*, where all private existence has been transcended and only the public remains. He thus affords the state the highest role among ethical organizations:

While bestowing upon each community, from the family to the cultural community, its [proper] place (*tokoro o ataeru*), the state *becomes self-conscious of and secures* their hierarchical order (*dankaiteki chitsujo*), i.e. *the developmental connection of the ethical organization* that runs through each of these stages. The state is a self-conscious and comprehensive *sittliche* organization of this sort.⁵¹

As we can see from this definition, Watsuji sees the state as *comprehensive* in that it includes all sub-groups—the church (or churches), economies, etc.—within itself, as opposed to the idea that the state is only one particular part of society with specific functions (as is found in a “*Gesellschaft* state”).⁵²

This comprehensive state thus secures the order amongst these levels within it through the force of law that emanates from the sacredness (*shinseisei*) of living totality. But of course, that is not to say that it is purely a spiritual principle—the force of law needs physical power and military might. With this spiritual and material force, the state maintains its sovereignty, ruling all stages beneath it, but ruled by no other higher totality.⁵³

⁵⁰ *WTZ10*, 492-593.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 595. 国家は家族より文化共同体に至るまでのそれぞれの共同体におのおのその所を与えつつ、さらにそれらの間の段階的秩序、すなわちそれら諸段階を通ずる人倫的組織の発展的連関を自覚し確保する。国家はかかる自覚的総合的な人倫的組織なのである。

⁵² *Ibid.*, 597-600.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 605.

For the sake of the unity of political authority and living totality, Watsuji criticizes the separation of the nation (the cultural *Gemeinschaft*) and the state (the political apparatus). He argues that nation and state were originally one, but the process of conquest and secularization results in governance that does not come from the totality of the spiritual community. Democracy is an attempt to return to the rule of the totality, but here the totality is merely a functional, rational totality rather than a “substantial” totality.⁵⁴

How does this totality relate with other totalities? Watsuji points out that the League of Nations was a failure due to “egotistic” countries merely protecting their private interests. But the idea of international organizations is not without merit—Watsuji praises the United Nations as an organization that upholds each nation as a sovereign totality with a right to exist. As such, it can be a functional totality that holds various nations together.⁵⁵ Watsuji has high hopes for the UN—that it might put an end to war, and thus be the highest ideal for *sittliche* organizations to aim toward. But he also warns that, due to the breadth of the world and the range of differences, having a universal concept of humanity is not possible and it is impossible to intuit a sense of this totality as sacred (that is, in a *Gemeinschaft* way). Rather, it is reason and theory that help us grasp the sacredness of this ethical totality and prevent this international order from degenerating into a merely profit-centered totality.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 609-613.

⁵⁵ First, the United Nations, with its permanent security council and their veto power, will fall under the same critique that Watsuji directed at the League of Nations. He might have been merely veiling his continued critique here. Second, he had just criticized the notion of “functional totalities” (democracy, the United Nations) as inferior to substantial totalities.

⁵⁶ *WTZ10*, 613-617.

He ends his discussion of the state by pointing out the duties of the citizen to the state. Watsuji stresses the importance of absolute obedience, especially in times of war, (which is an ethical duty to protect one's ethical totality). He also gives his support to the Imperial Rescript on Education,⁵⁷ and, in line with this, describes justice as "each citizen finding his/her place," and benevolent rule (*jinsei*) as guaranteeing this "justice" for the people.⁵⁸

The discussion of the state covers issues like democracy, just war, colonization, and international relations. Perhaps due to the nature of these topics, it is not unexpected that this part of *Ethics II* was subject to revision. I will discuss the differences between the 1942 wartime edition and the 1946 postwar edition in Chapter III.

Recapitulation

In *Ethics II*, Watsuji concretizes his discussion of how the dual-negative structure of *ningen sonzai* plays out in human ethical organizations. He shows how privacy exists as a privation of the public; and yet, in the negation of private existence in order to raise it to a higher level of publicness, the private existence still remains (it is not eradicated but sublated), and, at the same time, this higher level of publicness is exclusive and thus private relative to more public totalities. Furthermore, it is this very exclusivity of a totality that allows the privacy of its constituents to be sublated.

⁵⁷ The Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku ni kansuru chokugo*, 1890) was a public document that articulated the moral role of each imperial subject in the various relationships each subject is part of. It emphasized Confucian values and the unity of subjects under the emperor. It was read aloud at important school events, thus playing a central ritual, political, and pedagogic role.

⁵⁸ *WTZ10*, 620-624.

As such, we see here that Watsuji is performing a subtle “double-negation.” On one hand, he is clearly ideologically opposed to the idea of singularity and the “irreducibly other.” For him, there is no such thing as absolute individuality. But while he would seem to be placing his focus on absolute totality at the expense of absolute individuality, in truth, he heavily negates absolute totality as well: Absolute totality can only be manifest via finite totalities that still bear a sense of exclusion within them. There is no concrete totality without exclusion. Absolute totality thus exists as an unrealized idea, in tension with the reality of finite and exclusive totalities.

The dialectic of private and public existence (or individuality and totality) and its resulting finite totalities are closely tied to the idea of *mediation*. Relations are concretely mediated, and this mediation has a double-function of including those who share in it and excluding those who do not. Thus, the couple is mediated by the entire being of both members, the family by blood and sexual relations, the local community by land and labor, the economic system by products, and the cultural community by shared language, religion, sensibility, and knowledge. All these groups are finite, exclusive, and particular. Finally, this finite whole is realized, and its order preserved by a comprehensive, sovereign nation-state.

This notion of concrete mediation can be seen as picking up from the idea of the inseparability of subject and object, and thus expresses the notion of practical interconnections through acts. The relations of subjective *ningen* always go by way of concrete expressions: articulated words, actions, lifestyles, material culture, externalized ideas, etc. As embodied subjects, our physical relations expand in space and time as wider and wider networks of human connectivity.

Ethical activity is always situated in these human networks. Thus, truthfulness always occurs in response to the specific forms of trust in each of these finite totalities, resulting in different virtues: marital harmony, taking one's role in the community, consideration, friendship in culture, obedience to the state, and so forth. This suggests, although Watsuji does not stress this point, that differing relational media result in different dynamics of trust and truth. For instance, the way we relate through shared livelihood in a community is very different from how scholars relate with each other in the academic community through their shared relationship with truth. (This can be compared to Hannah Arendt, whose differentiation of labor, work, and action rest on the differing ways we relate on the ground of media like human needs for survival, culture, and political activity.⁵⁹)

4 *Ethics III* (1949)

The final volume of *Ethics* came out some seven years after the second volume. In this volume, Watsuji attempts to concretize the ideas of space and time as they were taken up in the first volume. From the idea of time he derives history, and from space he derives climate (*fûdo*), thus showing structurally how space and time are *lived* by human communities. In analyzing the historico-climatic particularity of human existence, he is also forced to contend with how various national histories come together as "History," and the question of the universal relationship of particular finite totalities to each other. Let us examine Watsuji's discussion of these points.

⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

4.1 Historicity

Watsuji begins his discussion by linking together the discussion in volume one on time, with that of volume two on ethical organizations. In *Ethics I*, time was seen as the temporal context of an ethical act, wherein an ethical act bears the given relationships established in the past and directs them toward possible relationships in the future. However, this holds true in every level of ethical organization (as discussed in *Ethics II*), wherein a particular past (shared experiences) determines a finite totality and guides it to a particular ought that is realized in a future specific to that totality.⁶⁰ Thus, ethical demands and responses by various communities occur not only in the context of individual temporality, but of a shared historicity.

However, the past is made up of an infinite number of relationships and shared events, and the future has an infinite number of possibilities. Can this dense mesh of occurrences even be called history? Watsuji argues that the countless facts of the past are *arranged* and *unified* as a part of history. Similarly, the infinite possibilities of the future are arranged on the basis of the ought, resulting in an awareness of “the way” (*michi*).⁶¹

Where do these arrangement and unification come from? For Watsuji, this unification is only possible via the unity of ethical organizations itself—that is, the state as the ethical organization that organizes ethical organizations in a self-conscious manner. This is because the state orients the counting of years and bestirs the will to preserve a common past, thus giving birth to recording and transmitting—two activities essential for history.⁶²

⁶⁰ *WTZ11*, 5-14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21-27.

His view of history is thus strictly tied to the nation-state as it discovers itself in relation to other nations—in the experience of difference, the wonder of cultural exchange, and, of course, conflict and war.⁶³

Philosophy of History. With the crusades and the wars across Europe, historical consciousness spreads beyond a handful of nations and becomes a true *world* history. This also makes the self-consciousness of history via the philosophy of history possible. With reference to other philosophers of history like Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Immanuel Kant, Watsuji attempts to clarify his own philosophy of history. He begins with a definition of history as follows:

History is that in which a unified human community that forms a state becomes self-conscious of its *self-unity* (*jiko no tôitsu*) in a stage transcending states, and expresses the key contents of the past that stipulate the *particular individuality* of this unified communal existence in an *objective and public form*, that is, a communal consciousness in which anyone can participate.⁶⁴

This history is shared amongst members of the community, and it comes to shape people in a normative way. But that does not mean that people are confined to the traditions of the past. Rather, for Watsuji, history needs to be constantly reinterpreted in the changing present, and this reinterpretation is a *free creation of the future*. As such, the past does not merely exist in itself, but depends on how it is grasped. It is only the past *as it is grasped* that shapes communal existence.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., 27-34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 41-42. 歴史とは、国家を形成せる統一的な人間共同体が、超国家的場面において自己の統一を自覚するとともに、この統一的な共同存在の独自の個性を規定している過去の内容のうちの主要なるものを、共同の知識として何人も参与し得るとき客観的公共的な形に表現したものである。

⁶⁵ Ibid., 42-43.

What founds the interpretation of the past? For Watsuji, the importance of a particular event is dependent on the role it plays in realizing cultural values.⁶⁶ As such, history is not value-free but is driven by the values of the community (and the historiographer).⁶⁷ This is where we see Watsuji defend his idea that the unity of history comes from the unity of ethical organizations—if we had no values to unify a nation, we would not even know which events would count as history.

4.2 The Ideals of History

Next, Watsuji examines the principle that drives history. Like Kant, he locates this principle in the realization of *freedom*. But he introduces the idea that freedom is realized according to the dual-structure of *ningen*, where the individual selflessly negates itself in service but also can resolutely negate totality in leadership.⁶⁸ In this realization of freedom, the individual plays a crucial role in the progress of history. In service to the totality, the individual realizes the unconscious demands of the will of the totality, and brings this into social consciousness.⁶⁹ In this way, Watsuji steers a course between individualist and collectivist history, and suggests that history moves by the power of the totality in a way that can only precipitate through individuals. As such, history moves by the dual-structure of *ningen*.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

⁶⁷ This idea is similar to Windelband's *An Introduction to Philosophy*, which is said to have influenced Watsuji's work greatly.

⁶⁸ *WTZ11*, 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 60-62.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61-64.

In this philosophy of history, toward what does history “develop,” and to what end do individual freedom and service contribute? Watsuji asserts that there has never been a living totality of humankind whether before or after the historical period, and as such, humankind is not a unity but “a space for conflict and war between nations and states.”⁷¹ But this space is one that moves toward unification, and Watsuji words this very carefully:

The *ideal* finally arose in history that we should form humankind into *one community* with no divisions of nation or state, and, in so doing, realize the law of *ningen sonzai* at the level of humankind (*jinruiteki ni*). This is the *ideal of the unity of humankind*. In this ideal, humankind can be said to have become *self-conscious* of its essence—that is, that the same law of *ningen sonzai* makes humankind into what it is.

This self-consciousness is a product of the history of humankind, but at the same time it can be said to be the *self-consciousness of the meaning of the history of humankind*.⁷²

Watsuji thus shows a conflicted view of the ideal of one community of humankind: It does not exist, and it is a foolish universalism to think that it does. But it is an ideal, a not-yet that history strives toward and derives its meaning from.

The road to realizing this ideal often goes by way of war, and the rise of empires realizes this ideal by spreading culture over a vast region. But, at the same time, by oppressing other nations and trying to erase their cultural uniqueness, this movement betrays

⁷¹ Ibid., 68. 諸国家諸民族の対立と争闘の場

⁷² Ibid. 人類が民族や国家の別なく一つの共同体を形成し、それによって人間存在の理法を人類的に実現すべきであるという理念が、歴史的に生み出されるに至った。これが人類の統一の理念である。この理念において人類はおのれの本質を、すなわち同じ人間存在の理法が人類を人類たらしめていることを、自覚したのであると云ってよいであろう。

この自覚は人類の歴史の産物であるが、同時にまた人類の歴史の意義の自覚であるということもできる。

the ideal of the unity of humankind—for Watsuji, this unity is not a culturally and ethnically homogenous whole but a unity in diversity. Thus, in trying to restore the diversity that was lost, the collapse of empires also realizes the same ideal of history.⁷³

Having sketched his philosophy of history, Watsuji speaks from the depths of the suffering in post-war Japan, writing that, while it is difficult to see the sense of meaning in a period filled with anguish, it is this darkness that makes people hunger for the light. What makes a period important is not what it accomplishes, but how much self-consciousness it awakens. But for Watsuji, it takes a prophet (*yogensha*) to attain self-consciousness in a dark time, for without a prophet, an age of despair is damned.⁷⁴ He thus addresses the reader directly, urging the reader to realize the historical significance of the tragedy of Japan and save it from “shame and disgrace.”⁷⁵ Perhaps each person bears the possibility of being such a “prophet.”

In the discussion of history, we see a strong stress on the importance of the individual. Progress in history depends on the individual and its self-consciousness. As such, individuality does not exist merely to propagate the totality as it is in itself or to passively submit to the whole, but to actively create and re-create totality.

4.3 Milieu

While history is a concrete expression of time, climate (*fûdo*) is a concrete expression of space. As we have seen in *Ethics I*, the movement of double negation (individuation and

⁷³ Ibid., 69-72.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 82-83.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 83.

unification) occurs between subjective bodies in geographic space. But this space is not individual and abstract “subjective space.” Rather, space is shared in each level of human interconnection. This allows Watsuji to return to his original insights in *Milieu* and connect them with the ethical theories in *Ethics I* and *II*.

Each level of ethical organization is mediated by the sites in which they take place: The home, with its architecture and furniture, is the space of the family and mediates the relationships between members. The same is true for a town, cultural sites, and, of course, each national territory. Watsuji also suggests that the state has a particularly important role in that, just like with time, the self-consciousness of the state is necessary in order to unify the countless number of spaces that influence the various levels of ethical organization in the realization of a climatic whole.⁷⁶

Watsuji connects this discussion to the history and philosophy of geography (Johann Gottfried Herder, Georg Hegel, Alexander von Humboldt, Lucien Febvre, Paul Vidal de la Blache), but he criticizes the tendency of these thinkers to ignore the ethical organizations that dwell upon the land as well as the aspect of time and history in geography. This shows Watsuji’s constant commitment to seeing climate and geography in relation to *ningen sonzai* as subjective practical connections in space and time.⁷⁷ There is no such thing as nature separate from *ningen*, nor *ningen* separate from climate and geography: Communities struggle with and shape their environment, and individuals, in their relationships with others, are shaped by their environment as well.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid., 93-111.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 151-152.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 153-155.

Watsuji ends with a scheme of classification that points out the different types of climate and its effects on the communities within. His discussion is similar to his previous book, *Milieu*. He retains the three original climatic types—monsoon, desert, meadow—and adds two more: American, and steppe.⁷⁹ Let me describe these very briefly.

Watsuji describes monsoon peoples as submissive and receptive, in response to the generosity but occasional savagery of nature. In contrast, desert peoples are shaped by their struggle with nature to be both submissive to the will of the totality and warlike. In the meadow, where nature submits to man's will, people grow a balance of activity and passivity, are spontaneous, and rational. The Americas are characterized by a wrestling with untamed nature in colonies, hence results in a blend of monsoon and desert characteristics, where people are receptive but in a warlike way, where war and struggle is characterized by reason, inventiveness, and technology. Finally, people in the steppes are shaped by their attempt to be one with the endless expanse of the savannah, and are characterized by a mix of tenaciousness and submissiveness that is warlike in retreat.⁸⁰

While there are some that would argue that this is a form of climatic determinism, I think the key idea that Watsuji is aiming at here is that space is not merely abstract—a generic sort of space that could hold true for a family anytime anywhere. Rather, particular climates affect the way towns are built and the way houses are fashioned, resulting in determinations of family life and local life that are particular to the *wind and earth* of a particular climatic region. He thus tries to situate space amongst specific milieus just as he tried to situate time within a specific history.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 167-168.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 169-191.

4.4 National Existence

History and milieu do not exist separately. Each level of milieuity influences the way history is formed within it. Conversely, the historicity guides the way human beings shape the milieu they are in. As such, milieuity and historicity are co-determining. As *ningen sonzai* unfolds in lived space and time and develops into the state, this unifying human network makes possible the realization (*jikaku*) of space and time as climate and history proper—that is, as territory and national history. This realization leads to a kind of existence Watsuji calls “national *sonzai*,” which is the existence of *ningen* in a manner that is self-conscious of itself as only-here and only-now, that is, climatically and historically particular.⁸¹

Watsuji deeply values this national particularity because he claims that this particularity is the only possible expression of the universal structure of *ningen*. Just like a sense of “having a vocation” is only possible if there is individuality, a sense of an eternal significance is only possible for a nation because it is climatically and historically particular.⁸²

However, while historical and climatic particularity gives nations certain strong points, it also gives people weaknesses that may show in the face of the challenges of history. For instance, Watsuji criticizes the lack of rationality in Japan. As such, it is necessary to try to address these weaknesses by realizing one’s national character, seeing where the problems lie, desiring to change, and slowly, collectively creating a new culture.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 192-193.

This task is what Watsuji calls “the ought of nations” (*kokumin no tōi*), which we shall return to shortly.⁸³

Toward what do nations grow? As we have seen in the ideals of history, Watsuji sees history as following the same movement of double-negation as in *Ethics I*, by which absolute totality/negativity returns to itself through individuals via the process of negation. Watsuji sees history as beginning with primitive human beings who were very homogeneous. But with the development of humankind across history and varying climates in the various parts of the world, people gradually become different, and this difference becomes a source of conflict with others. But this conflict is also a means for people to become aware of themselves as different. As such, if nations do not stubbornly cling to their identities and absolutize their particularity, this can be an opportunity for nations to respect other nations, to learn from them, and to exist in harmony with them, thus realizing the ideal of “one humankind.”⁸⁴ In other words, the original homogeneity of humankind is negated in the differentiation of history that allows nations to become self-conscious, but this national particularity must be negated in a way that is sublated, that is, maintained but synthesized in a world of unity-in-difference.⁸⁵

4.5 National Imperatives

This movement of humankind has requirements that are both intra-national and international:

⁸³ Ibid., 193-195.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 198-203.

⁸⁵ In order to substantiate this claim that history moves toward unity-in-difference, Watsuji provides his commentary on a brief history of the world in about 140 pages. But allow me to skip this in order to focus on Watsuji’s systematic content.

Within a nation, there are two main ethical tasks: The first is the formation of a national ethical organization—that is, to be able to form a truly ethical state that orders and protects the various ethical organizations beneath it. It is within this state and the sub-organizations within it that people practice their particular form of morality. In trying to realize this, many nations will realize that they need to reform their very culture or social structure, which leads to the second task: that of realizing one's national character and its limits in order to overcome it. He takes up Japan as a particular example, criticizing family relations, economic and political viewpoints, cultural issues, and so on, and suggesting necessary reforms.⁸⁶ (For details of this critique, see Chapter III.)

Between nations, what is necessary is the formation of one world. Politically, this requires a supranational organization to unify and orchestrate the interrelation of nations. But this inter-national *sittliche* organization is not a global democracy, which is logistically impossible for Watsuji. Rather, he thinks that what is necessary is organized ethical states that relate with each other through an apparatus like the League of Nations or the United Nations. This demands a certain abandonment of the idea of sovereignty altogether, where nation-states cede their sovereignty and, with their general will, generate a global sovereignty. As such, sovereignty is suspended between individual nation-states and the international organization.⁸⁷

The first step toward this is a rational and self-aware formation of global economics. This globalization is not one of unregulated capitalist competition, but rather, economic relations of mutual service and benefit that takes advantage of climatic specificity

⁸⁶ *WTZ11*, 347-349.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 402-403.

in order to create sustainable systems where different nations can exchange goods with each other. Additionally, it requires the formation of a global culture. But this global culture is not a homogenous culture imposed on all nations—an impossible and impoverishing attempt. Rather, it is the formation of an international culture that is overlaid on national culture and appropriated to it—particularity on the inside, but cosmopolitan unity on the outside. Watsuji positively evaluates the English language and the American way in forming this global culture.⁸⁸

With this sort of international economics and culture, it will then be possible for nations to still respect each other’s particularity, and cultivate their own natural culture, without falling into the fallacy of thinking that “being unique means being better” or falling into the error of closing up one’s country (*sakoku*) like Japan did.⁸⁹

Recapitulation

In *Ethics III*, Watsuji combines his discussion of the spatio-temporal situatedness of ethics in the first volume with the idea of nesting *sittliche* organizations in the second volume. Thus, we see that each level of finite totality has its own communal spatiality and temporality. But since Watsuji connects these with his initial discoveries in *Milieu*, communal spatiality and temporality are specified as “milieuity” and “historicity,” and his argument develops in two directions at once:

On one hand, national milieu (territory) and national history are *particular*. That is, the spatiality of a family is not just of *any* family but of *this* family in *this* town in *this*

⁸⁸ Ibid., 403-407.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 408-414.

nation-state. The same holds true for historicity. This effectively situates ethical acts not only in a generic spatio-temporal context of trust relations, but in a specific history and milieu, giving each ethical act a character of being particularized as “only here and only now.”

On the other hand, these specific milieus and histories are not closed off from each other. A key contribution of the third volume to the dialectic of private and public existence is what might be termed “self-realization of identity through difference”: A finite totality can only realize its own identity in history by coming into relation (or conflict) with other totalities, and can only realize its climatic particularity again in relation with others. Thus, the specification of histories and milieus bring them into the universal—the metanarrative of “History.” In this history, the double-negation of emptiness unfolds on the level of nations, where nations differentiate from one another in conflict, and try to realize the unity-in-difference of “one humankind.”

Thus, *Ethics III* completes the contextualization and particularization of ethics in concrete and uniquely placed finite totalities, but brings ethics back into the realm of the universal at the same time. It also pulls together his insights from *Milieu* and *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* as well as the two previous volumes of *Ethics*, and thus closing the trilogy of his systematic ethics.

5 The Crux of *Rinrigaku*

Watsuji also wrote five books in direct support of his systematic project. In *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason* (1935), Watsuji carefully analyses the second critique of Kant in order to lay a foundation for his *Anthropologie*. This is further developed in *Person and Humanity* (1938), where he examines the dual-structure of *ningen sonzai* in Kant’s ideas

of *Person* and *Personlichkeit*. He also includes some supplementary essays here, like his critique of phenomenology, his discussion of Max Scheler's *materiale Wertethik*, his response to dialectic theology, and his 1931 essay on Buddhist philosophy. In 1938, he also published *Confucius*, which applies his philological method to the *Analects*, lauds the great teacher's dedication to the question of *Sittlichkeit* (*jinrin*), and thus clarifies the Confucian influence that can be seen in his *Ethics*. In *The Ethics of Polis-tic Ningen* (1948), Watsuji develops his initial analysis of Aristotle with a full examination of his works, accompanied by an overall study of the ethics of ancient Greece from the Pre-Socratics to Epicurus. Finally, in *The Pioneers of Modern Philosophy of History* (1950), he introduces Vico and Herder to Japan. These two thinkers were central to his idea of milieu and the philosophy of geography. Thus, these five books deepen Watsuji's insights into various philosophers, both eastern and western, and clarify his debt to them.

Let us now return to the questions we posed at the beginning of this chapter: What is the essence of Watsuji's systematic ethical period? How is this systematically developed across the various publications of this period? As to the essence of Watsuji's systematic ethics, I think there are four core ideas.

The first idea is Watsuji's attempt to understand human existence as something best described by "dualities"—seemingly opposing ideas that need to be simultaneously maintained in order for human existence to have any meaning. In *Milieu*, Watsuji first mentions these dualities: subject/object, individual/community, and milieu/history. In *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, we see this incorporated into the etymologies of *rinrigaku*, *ningen*, and *sonzai*, and into the very hermeneutic method of ethics. In *Ethics*, these are discussed as "structures" or "moments": individuality/totality, private/public, space/time,

milieu/history, and universal/particular. Thus, Watsuji's understanding of *ningen* was always through the non-duality of mutually negating pairs: a tensional unity whose difference maintains human existence as what it is.

The second core idea is Watsuji's attempt to retrieve the *ethical relevance* of communal life. This begins in *Ethics as a Study of Ningen*, and is best captured by the very first sentence of *Ethics I*:

The essential significance of the attempt to describe ethics as the study of *ningen* consists in getting away from the misconception, prevalent in the modern world, that conceives of ethics as a problem of individual consciousness *only*.⁹⁰

Throughout all his works, Watsuji asserts this "relational core," wherein ethics is impossible unless considered in light of relationships—between individuals, between segments of society, and even between nations in history.

The third core idea is Watsuji's drive to clarify the *nature* of these relationships. In *Ethics I*, he showed how *aidagara* involves not merely reason, but the body, feelings, the will, and consciousness. He also pointed out how embodiment makes relationships necessarily spatial and temporal, and how these form concrete but dynamic trust relationships. In *Ethics II*, he pointed out that relationships are mediated by concrete things, and are thus finite—with an inside and an outside that demarcate the bounds of a totality. These form a series of nesting human networks. In *Ethics III*, he argued that the self-realization of these totalities is only possible through the encounter with other totalities, which placed the awareness and development of totalities within an inter-totality context.

The two previous ideas join to form a fourth: Ethics is thus situated in *finite, concrete totalities*. An ethical act is not to be abstracted as an isolated act of an individual

⁹⁰ WTZ10, 11 (9).

will, but is to be seen as situated in spatio-temporal relationships, responding to concrete trust relations, which are emplaced within finite human networks of “practical interconnections through acts.” Each of these networks has their own historicity and milieuity, which are firmly rooted in unique historical and climatic positions. All ethics is thus in a particular *here* and in a particular *now*, enmeshed in a manifold of relations in a thoroughly inextricable way.

How do these four core ideas of Watsuji relate with each other? The idea of emptiness (or absolute negativity) can be seen as unifying these four core ideas. From *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* (and, as we will see, from as early as Watsuji’s Buddhist writings), the idea of emptiness functioned as that which unified various dualities like individuality and totality as the absolute negation behind their negative relationship. At the same time, emptiness functions as “non-duality” (*jita funi*) that is the fundamental relationality of the self and the other, and forms the core of his *aidagara* theory. Furthermore, emptiness also functions in the nature of relationships as dynamic expansion (sublating private existence) and dialectical negation (preserving private existence). But, as we will see in later chapters, emptiness is simultaneously something that is expressed *only* through finite totalities. This unification of Watsuji’s core ideas through emptiness will be a central issue of this dissertation.

However, while these four ideas may be unified through Watsuji’s ideas of emptiness, is there not also a potential for conflict between these ideas? That is to say, does the focus on the ethical relevance of community not tend to upset the balance of the dualities of human existence in favor of a “totality-centered” approach to ethics? Furthermore, does the insistence on the localization of ethics in finite totalities not destroy the universality of the “nature” of relationality in favor of relativism? This will be the other

focus of this dissertation: the dilemmas that Watsuji faced and how they threaten to destroy the unity of his ethical system from within. Through an analysis of this unity of Watsuji's "ethics of emptiness" and its dilemmas, I hope to clarify both the limitations and the possibilities of his ethics. Let us begin with the question of the nature of relationality in the next chapter.

Chapter II.¹ Relationality and Singularity

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the essence of Watsuji's *Ethics* and its systematic development. Front and center in Watsuji's project was the idea of the relationality (*aidagara*) of human existence. In this chapter, I will first recapitulate on the core idea of what Watsuji means by relationality. I will then try to examine what it might contribute to the contemporary discourse on the relational subject, beginning with the relationship of Watsuji's approach to the ethics of care, which has been suggested by Erin McCarthy. Then, I will proceed to the question of the *limits* of relationality and consider to what extent human beings can or cannot share in relationships, focusing particularly on Watsuji's view of the sharing of death, which was a response to Martin Heidegger. Taking the post-structural responses to Heidegger as a hint, I will explore other ways of combining relationality and singularity. Finally, I will see if it is possible to account for *both* overlapping selves as well as otherness within Watsuji's own view of relationships.

1 Relational Existence

In the previous chapter, we see Watsuji stress the importance of moving from an "individualist" view of ethical life to a "relational" view of the human being. We see this in

¹ Key ideas leading up to this chapter have been previously published in "Community of No-Self: The Ethical-Existential Structure of Community in Watsuji Tetsurô and Jean-Luc Nancy," in *Applied Ethics: Theories, Methods and Cases*, ed. Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2012), 48-61.

his definition of *rinri* and in his usage of the singular/plural word *ningen*. But Watsuji very interestingly shows how the very methodology of ethics, the act of ethical inquiry, is relational.

Watsuji asserts that when we ask ethical questions—like we are now—something very special is happening. I, the author (and hopefully you, the reader), am asking “What is ethics? What is *ningen*?” On one hand, this means that, individually, the question of ethics is being raised. But at the same time, the question is raised in a collective space—in the figurative space of a reading (between the author and the reader), in a school (between teacher and student), or amongst friends. Even when I raise this question privately, the question raised is raised in language—we did not make up the words “what” or “is” or “ethics,” and, in these words, we carry our relationality. Part of these words is the history they carry: When I ask about “ethics,” I carry the issues raised by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Christianity, modern philosophy, and perhaps even influences from non-western sources like Confucius or Buddha. Thus, while the question is undoubtedly raised by the individual, the question is, in a sense, also asked by humankind as a whole, by communities, by relationships. *Ningen* is asking about *ningen*—and in ethics, *ningen* in a sense *comes home to itself*. And we seek ourselves in our shared expressions—words, literature, paintings, religious practices, political life, and so on. With these, Watsuji paints a thoroughly relational picture of human life and its ethical quest.

In this section, we shall go deeper into the first few sections of Watsuji’s discussion on the fundamental structure of *ningen sonzai* and show the kind of relationality that Watsuji sees as inherent to everyday life.

He begins with an everyday experience of writing. The experience of writing has often, in the history of western thought, been taken as an occasion to demonstrate the

indubitable existence of the ego, even to the point of lapsing into solipsism, as in the image of Descartes, alone in his study, contemplating if anything else is real. But does this really make sense? Watsuji argues:

For writing is an expression of words, and words are what have come to shape themselves in anticipation of partners who live and talk together. Even though words are written in a foreign language and perhaps with the intention of allowing no one else to read them, this does not mean that these words have come into being without there being partners to talk with, but only that the author is without partners with whom to talk.²

Writing presumes possible readers. The tone, the language used, the set of vocabulary, the level of politeness, even the modes of encryption—all of these aspects of writing are determined in response to possible readers. The same applies to the experience of reading, for reading invariably puts one in relationship with the author of what one is reading. Even when one is reading about how one can become certain of oneself as an isolated ego in a solipsistic text, one is learning about this solipsistic notion in a very non-solipsistic manner, reading the words and ideas of the author.

Given this, Watsuji concludes: “No matter how much we concern ourselves with the consciousness of *I*, this concern itself implies our going beyond the consciousness of *I* and being connected with others.”³ Our everyday experience is not from the point of view of a readerless author nor an authorless reader, but *between* the author and the reader.

He then defines relationality as follows:

We take our departure not from the intentional consciousness of “I” but from “betweenness.” The essential feature of *betweenness* lies in this, that the intentionality of

² WTZ10, 52 (50).

³ Ibid.

the *I* is from the outset prescribed by its counterpart, which is also conversely prescribed by the former.⁴

This means that the author is always determined by readers, and a reader is always determined by authors in a reciprocal determination and mutual dependency. “This relationship is constructed, through and through in the betweenness between an author and his readers. Neither can exist prior to and independent of the other. They exist only by depending on one another.”⁵

The same betweenness holds in the present setting where a teacher and students come together for a class. Watsuji points out that a class is only possible given the relationality between a teacher and his or her students. It presumes certain roles played out by teachers and by students, and these roles will shape the comportment of both teachers and students, allowing for the educational relationship to unfold. This discussion is crucial in that it builds up to Watsuji’s discussion of *institutions* or totalities beyond the I-thou relationship. For him, an institution (like a school) is no more than the solidification or composite of these relationships:

A school is represented by the existence of a group of buildings and other facilities. But they are not the school itself. Even when a school is abolished, the buildings that belonged to it can still remain intact. And even without buildings, it could be possible for a school to be established. A school consists of human relationships that are given expression to, by, and within these buildings.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 53-54 (51). それは我々の出発点を我れの志向的意識としてでなくまさに「間柄」としてさし示しているからである。間柄の本質は、我れの志向がすでに初めより相手によって規定せられ、また逆に相手の志向をも規定している、ということであった。

⁵ Ibid., 55 (52).

⁶ Ibid., 56-57 (53-54).

Moreover, there is no temporal priority between the school and the students and teachers. Without students and teachers, there can be no school. Even when a school is first conceived, it operates considering possible students and teachers in a future-oriented relationship with them. Also, teachers become teachers and students become students within the context of the school. Just as the existence of teachers is simultaneous with that of students, schools exist simultaneously with the body of teachers and students. Watsuji shows a similar discussion of this in family life, which we will examine more, later in this chapter.

Looking at the author-reader, teacher-student, and parent-child relationships within the context of school, home, and other spheres of everyday life, Watsuji points out our fundamental relationality vis-à-vis our roles:

We can now confirm an obvious everyday fact, that we always act with *a certain capacity (shikaku)* and that this capacity is *prescribed by something whole*, further that this whole is the *relationship* we construct by means of possessing a certain capacity. Simply speaking, we exist in our daily life in the being in betweenness.⁷

The idea of “capacity” has a key role in Watsuji’s argument: A capacity/role is the meeting point between the individuals and the totality. Relational being (*aidagarateki sonzai*) means being constantly situated in these capacities, as both a singular member, and as a part of the whole in one’s “plural” existence.

However, it is important to note that in line with Watsuji’s idea of practical interconnections through acts (*jissenteki kôiteki renkan*), capacities and the relationships that unfold through them are *concrete*, and bear the many facets of embodied subjectivity. In

⁷ Ibid., 61 (57). そこで我々は、わかり切った日常の事実として、我々が常に何らかの資格において働いていること、その資格は何らか全体的なるものに規定せられていること、しかもその全体的なるものは一定の資格における我々が作り出すところの間柄であること、などを確定することができる。簡単に言えば、我々は日常的に間柄的存在においてあるのである。

the section entitled “Individual Moments Making up Human Existence,” Watsuji details how we relate with each other through our physical bodies, as seen from things like handshakes to sexual relations to maternal care relations. Watsuji concludes, “Bodily connections are always visible wherever betweenness prevails, even though the manner of connection may differ.”⁸

However, because we are embodied *subjects*, these connections do not end with bodily connections. Through embodied communication, we mutually determine each other in every facet. The emotions of other people affect others—we are saddened when we are with a friend who is grieving, seeing their expressions and postures and hearing their words. But, in the same way, when we join a social gathering where the sounds and movements show that everyone is in a bright mood, our moods are lifted as well. (Watsuji credits Max Scheler for this well-developed analysis of the interpenetration of feeling.)⁹ Furthermore, our perceptions of phenomena are altered by the way others perceive them—from grosser examples like the immediate sense of urgency at an accident (that one might not have even seen oneself but that one has seen others react to) to more subtle examples like the influence of language, shared through spoken or written words, even on our solitary perceptions of “blue” or “*aoi*.”

In this way, relational being forms the physical, cognitive, emotive, and volitional parts of each individual. In practical interconnections through acts, we acquire roles or

⁸ Ibid., 65 (62).

⁹ Ibid., 74-76 (70-71).

capacities, not merely as theoretical beings nor as mechanical functionaries, but as thinking, feeling, willing embodied subjects in emotional systems,¹⁰ groups that act together, and so forth.

However, in these relational systems, Watsuji sees the paradox of individuality and totality:

This being in betweenness is, from the common sense standpoint, grasped from two angles. The first is that betweenness is constituted ‘among’ individual persons. Thus, we must say that the individual members who compose it existed prior to this betweenness. The second is that the individual members who compose this betweenness are determined by it as its members. From this perspective, we can say that antecedent to there being individual members, the betweenness that determined them existed.¹¹

Relations constitute relata, and relata constitute relationships. Which comes first? How does Watsuji resolve this paradox? We will grapple with these questions in both this chapter and in the next.

Above, we have seen the four main features of Watsuji’s notion of *aidagara*: First, intentionality is always mutually constituted. I exist toward something not in a purely private manner but in a way that is defined by others, and vice-versa. Second, my relational being is always situated within roles/capacities, by which I shape and am shaped by relationships. Through roles, relata and relations are mutually constituting, thus forming the par-

¹⁰ “Emotional system” is a term used in psychotherapy, which describes how people interrelate to form an economy of emotions, wherein certain patterns govern the flow of feelings amongst a group of people (particularly in a family or in a therapy group).

¹¹ *WTZ10*, 61 (57-58). この間柄的存在はすでに常識の立場において二つの視点から把握せられている。一は間柄が個々の人々の「間」「仲」において形成せられるということである。この方面からは、間柄に先立ってそれを形成する個々の成員がなくてはならぬ。他は間柄を作る個々の成員が間柄自身からその成員として限定せられるということである。この方面から見れば、個々の成員に先立ってそれを規定する間柄がなくてはならない。

adox of individuality and totality. Third, these relations are concrete and multidimensional, and involve not merely rational but emotional, volitional, and corporeal aspects. And fourth, this mutual determination of concrete relationships occurs within institutions or totalities like schools and families, which are in turn mutually constitutive of these particular relationships.

2 Watsuji and the Ethics of Care

I believe that Watsuji's idea of *aidagara* is a key contribution to philosophy. As evidence of this, it is Watsuji's most warmly received ethical idea, at least in the Anglosphere. We see this in Mayeda's *Time, Space and Ethics in the Philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurô, Kuki Shûzô, and Martin Heidegger*. Also, in Odin's *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*, he focuses on this relational model of personhood as the core of Watsuji's theory, and shows how it was developed by other thinkers like Kimura Bin (in his idea of *aida*), Hamaguchi Eshun ("context"), and Kumon Shunpei ("*kanjin* 間人").^{12,13} Of all of these positive appraisals of Watsuji's theory, Erin McCarthy's *Ethics Embodied* (2010) stands out as one of the most interesting, attempting to connect Watsuji to another thoroughly relational view of ethics.

2.1 McCarthy's Watsuji-ron

¹² Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 68-77.

¹³ Some thinkers like Utsunomiya Yoshiaki (in *Ningen no aida to rinri*, 1980) see Watsuji's theory of relationality as departing from the notion of the "I-Thou" relationship (as found in Levinas or Buber). While this does lead to some weaknesses that I will soon discuss, I do think that this departure allows Watsuji to speak more effectively about larger groups like a family, a church, or a nation-state. These relationships are *not* reducible to I-Thou relationships or the sum of these. See Nishitani, 39-40.

Here I will briefly introduce McCarthy's reading of Watsuji. Primarily drawing from Watsuji's *Ethics I*, she foregrounds Watsuji's concern for *aidagara*, which sees *ningen* as fundamentally relational and thus integrating both individuality and totality:

Ningen is a dynamic concept of self, on that John Maraldo has suggested be understood, not as a metaphysical entity, rather as an interrelation. *Ningen* is not to be understood as something fixed with a determinate identity; rather, as *ningen*, one's identity is found relationally—between persons—and as such continually shifts and changes. Indeed to be *ningen* means to move freely between the social and the individual.¹⁴

She relates this relational self with Thomas Kasulis' "intimacy orientation," where the self is not seen as essentially autonomous (as it is in the "integrity orientation,") but is seen as fundamentally overlapping with and mutually constituted with others. Thus, self is not rationally definable but rather is objective in a "dark" manner, including non-rational components of relation, like affect and embodiment.¹⁵

McCarthy connects relationality and the non-duality of individuality and totality, which I will discuss later in this chapter, to Watsuji's idea of emptiness:

Ningen transcends dualities and defies what we might normally think of as self. There is no self substance, for example, no idea of "soul" at play here. *Ningen* has, as part of its structure, a refusal to be a self-containing, self-contained object; its very structure is nondualistic.¹⁶

A fundamental aspect of *ningen* is the movement of transcending dualities; of dissolving of individual into community, of self into other, and back again and somehow all of this at the same time, and has its roots in the Buddhist notion of emptiness or nothingness—*kū*.¹⁷

¹⁴ Erin McCarthy, *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 13.

¹⁵ Thomas Kasulis has himself discussed Watsuji as an ethicist of the intimacy orientation. While I agree with this for the most part, Watsuji himself would have some concerns about being portrayed as an "oriental theorist." My objections for this are detailed in Chapter IV, and I have discussed Kasulis and Watsuji in greater detail in my essay "*Gaijin* Philosophy and the Problems of Universality and Culture."

¹⁶ McCarthy, 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15. Diacritics emended.

McCarthy employs Watsuji's notions of *aidagara* and non-duality to show the limitations of Martin Heidegger's and Edmund Husserl's views of the relationship of the subject and others. In her chapter on "The Embodied Self," she fully develops the role of the embodiment of relationships, which Watsuji sees as central to epistemology and ethics, as a critique of the western denigration of the body.

Kasulis' theory of intimacy-oriented cultures originally referred to both the dominant culture of Japan, but also the feminist sub-culture of the west. Interestingly, McCarthy takes up this hint and connects Watsuji's ethics to feminism and the ethics of care. Let us examine this in more detail.

Similar to Watsuji's critique of individualism, the ethics of care was born as a critique against the Kantian view of ethics (which focuses on the rational individual) offered by Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development:

[Carol] Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* famously suggested that girls approached moral problems from a different perspective than that of boys. . . . Her conclusions suggested that women and girls placed more importance on relationships and context than boys, who, according to Kohlberg's theory, ended up more frequently at what he alleges is the highest level of moral reasoning—the level that appeals to abstract principles and rules.¹⁸

Gilligan thus tried to argue the philosophical/ethical relevance of caring as it occurs within concrete relationships, against a tradition that overwhelmingly focused on abstract duties or individual virtues. This was followed up by Nel Noddings' *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, which argues for the notion of interdependence. McCarthy explains, "This interdependence involves seeing oneself not as primarily separate from others, rather, as belonging in a network of relationships that support one's

¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

autonomy.”¹⁹ This was philosophically developed by other figures like Virginia Held, and developed as a debate on “justice” vs. “care,” and the appropriate relationship between these two approaches to ethics.

In both Watsuji and the ethics of care, we see a focus on a relational model of self and concrete relationships between actual people as *central* to the ethical project. Watsuji also uses the mother-child model as a concrete example for human relationality, just as ethics of care stresses. McCarthy frames this model of ethics as the unity of self-care and care for the other:

For an ethics of care and Watsuji’s philosophy, it is this relation, this basic fact of human being-in-the-world that obliges us to care for the other. Due to the interdependent nature of being human where the other is a part of the self, self-care becomes other care and other care becomes self-care. We can no longer look at the other as something entirely isolated from ourselves and thus, realizing our deep interconnect-edness, we cannot ignore the other’s pain or suffering as it is also our own.²⁰

Additionally, in her chapter on “Body, Self and Ethics,” McCarthy highlights another contribution of Watsuji via his notion of “subjective *bodies*.” Using Luce Irigaray, she points out that Western philosophy had, in stressing the duality between body and mind and asserting the superiority of the latter, marginalized the position of women (who are associated with the body). Watsuji’s retrieval of the importance of embodiment could be part of a retrieval of the importance of women in ethical life.

Thus, in McCarthy’s *Embodied Ethics*, Watsuji can be seen as an ally of ethics of care. Both combat the forgetfulness of relationality and embodiment in ethics, the tendency to focus on abstract individual duties and virtues, and the overlooking of the very agency of relationships in the good life.

¹⁹ Ibid., 57.

²⁰ Ibid., 58.

2.2 Further Contributions and Critiques

McCarthy's *Watsuji-ron* and its attempt to connect Watsuji to feminist ethics has begun to gather some attention even in Japan. Morimura Osamu has played a key role here, with his article on "Embodied 'Care Ethics'." But while he very positively appraises McCarthy's daring comparison and attempt to construct an embodied ethics of care, he criticizes her basic understanding of Watsuji. His main contention is that McCarthy neglects the *ontological* aspect of Watsuji, and only sees him as describing a relational "self." She thus misses the core attempt of Watsuji to go beyond the ontic description of the fact of a self in relation and to radically reconsider existence (*sonzai*) as *fundamentally linked to relational ningen*.²¹ While a total examination of his argument is beyond the scope of this paper, I think that *both* Watsuji and care ethics (at least McCarthy and Noddings) need to better clarify the relationship between the *ontisch* fact of relationality, the *ontologisch* relationality of *ningen sonzai* itself, and the *ethical* demand of relation (in care or trust/truth).

For example, McCarthy extrapolates from Watsuji's theory of interrelation a notion that our pain and suffering (and hence our freedom from it) are interrelated. This reads Noddings into Watsuji, where the former links an attention to or "engrossment" with the other to a "motivational displacement:" "Motivational displacement follows on the heels of attention if A is sympathetic to B's plight. If B is in pain, A will want to

²¹ "Shintaika sareta 'kea no rinrigaku' (1): Feminisuto tetsugaku to 'Watsuji rinrigaku' no hikaku tetsugakuteki kōsatsu," *Ibunka* (2014): 42-44.

relieve that pain.”²² However, I do not think this connection is explicit in Watsuji’s ethics. While Watsuji discusses sympathy and shared emotions, he discusses the *fact* of human relatedness, and not how it ought to be. In such a factual relatedness, “engrossment” could be between a torturer and his/her victim—where motivational displacement would definitely not follow from this intense, focused attention. Thus, we see that we need to clarify the jump from the ontic to the ontological and ethical. I do see possibilities in this, but I must wait until Chapter VI to discuss it further.

However, despite these limitations to McCarthy’s reading, I do believe that Watsuji can prove to be a good dialogue partner for care ethics (as Morimura acknowledges.) In some ways, perhaps Watsuji can even contribute to care ethics through his radical framework of ontology and human relations.²³

One key suggestion comes from his theory of virtue. Watsuji contributes to this argument in *Ethics II*, where he points out that “virtue” is always specific to particular trust relationships: marital harmony is between husband and wife, mutual service is in economic relations, and justice is in the relationship of citizens and the state.

This responds to two core problems in care ethics. First is, is care reducible to virtue? Noddings argues that seeing care as an individual virtue (“this cleaning lady is a very caring person”) focuses too much on the carer and not enough on the cared for and the continuity of the care relation. Thus, at best, care as a virtue ought to be merely one small part of care ethics, which is focused on caring *relationships*.²⁴ Watsuji would not

²² Nel Noddings, *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17.

²³ The core problems in care ethics are referenced from Maureen Sander-Staudt, “Care Ethics,” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2011). <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

²⁴ Noddings, 19.

only accept this, but he would push it even further: If we understand care as the responsiveness of one to another in a particular relational context, then care is not merely a virtue, but is the very ground of every single virtue—from the civic virtues of Greece to the Confucian cardinal virtues. A good example can be found in his view of the Confucian virtues in the caring relationship between parents and children:

The relationship of trust and truthfulness (*shinjitsu*) between parent and child is manifest through filial piety (*kô*) . . . That which is called “filial duty” (*kôyô*) toward children is this “truthfulness” (*makoto*). In the same way, a parent also places a deep trust in a child. When the child is young, this potential is trusted; and when the adult matures, this actuality is trusted. . . . The child’s truthfulness in response to this trust is none other than filial piety.²⁵

First, we see that the caring of a parent to the child is constantly responsive to that child, changing in response to the maturation of the child, thus stressing the co-determined character of the virtue of filial piety. Second, the filiality of a parent is interlinked to the filiality of the child—if the parent does not place any trust in the child, then the child cannot respond in truth, and vice-versa. Thus, filial piety is a cooperative virtue that expresses the interdependence of parent and child even in moral life.

Another key question Watsuji’s theory responds to is the question of justice vs. care. This is one of the core arguments of care ethics that began in Gilligan’s critique of Kohlberg. Here we saw the need to focus on concrete caring relations over abstract conceptions of justice. In response to this, proponents of justice have rebutted that care ethics lacks impartiality and universalizability, and, in its focus on concrete caring relations, tends to be parochial and nepotistic. More recently, care ethicists have tried to take this

²⁵ WTZ10, 401. 親子の間の信頼と真実の関係が孝として現われる…子への「孝養」として言い現されたものはこの「まこと」であった。同様に親もまた子に対して深い信頼をかける。子の幼い間はその可能性が信頼され、子が成長すればこの現実性が信頼される。…この信頼に対して答える子の側の真実がまさに孝にほかならぬ。

argument further by trying to show how care actually founds justice. For instance, Susan Moller Okin shows that in order to develop autonomous, just citizens, they need more than just justice but nurturing and socialization in caring relationships.²⁶ Only caring breeds justice. Noddings supports this, arguing that by being cared for and by learning to care for others, one is able to (more generally) care *about* others—an attitude that founds even Rawls’s idea of justice.²⁷

Again, Watsuji not only seconds this but pushes this argument further. First, he argues in *Ethics II* that all communities (from the family to the ethnic nation) focus on trying to help the person move beyond his/her individual interests, toward responding to trust relations with others. Thus, caring relationships are supported on every level of society. But even the state’s idea of justice “as giving each person his/her place” is a fundamentally *caring* notion of justice. It is not about the fair distribution of individual goods, resources, or rights. Rather, it is about enabling the individual’s belonging in various communities that provide care and the opportunities to care. (And, like Fiona Robinson, he will make this caring justice the foundation even of international relations. We will examine this in Chapter IV.)

There are many more possible and quite interesting comparisons between Watsuji and care ethics. For instance, Noddings’s attempt to make care the foundation for social policy in *Starting at Home* resonates deeply with the previous paragraph. Furthermore,

²⁶ Fiona Robinson. *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations*. Boulder (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 23-24.

²⁷ Noddings, 22.

Noddings's ideas on care, community, and moral education can provide very useful resonances with Watsuji's theories.²⁸ I leave these possible angles for a later time.

However, despite all of these existing and possible connections between Watsuji and care ethics, there are some very important differences between these two. McCarthy points out two incompatibilities: A lack of systems for evaluating exploitative relationships and a complete blindness to feminism.²⁹ (One must concede the latter point—it is difficult to argue that Watsuji's *Ethics* is “feminist.” However, McCarthy fails to examine *Ethics III*, in which Watsuji demonstrates a certain critique of oppressive relationships that might refute McCarthy's criticism.)

The most dangerous incompatibility between Watsuji and McCarthy's vision of care ethics needs to be further stressed. A central part of feminist ethics is the notion of *alterity*—woman as the “other” of patriarchal ethics, that cannot be subsumed into its orders. Thus, feminist ethics tries to consider this notion of otherness that is maintained even in relationships:

The mirror is a metaphor for what Edouard Glissant would call totalizing framework—one that seeks understanding by assimilating difference to what is already understood. It seeks sameness and rest, in the sense of reducing the unknown to the familiar (and comfortable). Dualistic frameworks are totalizing; they leave no room for change or relation with the other, other than in an oppositional framework where one side is devalued. By contrast, Irigaray's metaphor of fluidity and mucosity and Watsuji's concept of *ningen*, not only allow for but promote non-totalizing frameworks. That is, ways of understanding that are open to, and encouraging of, communion with the other (what Glissant calls “Relation”) without assimilating or subsuming what is different (i.e., the female) to what is the same (i.e., what is male).³⁰

²⁸ See Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).

²⁹ McCarthy, 66.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

What McCarthy is seeking for in Irigaray and in the ethics of care is a view of relationship that is *non-totalizing*, that is, that allows the other to remain other despite one's communion with the other. While she herself considers that Watsuji's notion of community may in fact be totalizing, she maintains a hope that Watsuji's concept of *ningen* might be a space for this non-totalizing communion she is searching for. But is Watsuji's ethics really one of a balanced relationship between individuality and totality? Does the notion of *aidagara* allow for both relationship as well as otherness?

3 The Excesses of Aidagara

In order to address these questions, let us examine the development of relationality in *Ethics II*. There, we see that a key aspect is that all relationships are mediated by finite things that are shared. The couple shares in every single facet of their existence. The family shares in blood relations and sexual relations. The local community shares in their communal lifestyle and experiences. The flow of economic relations is mediated by actual goods and the interplay of human needs and wants. And the cultural community is mediated by various cultural products in a shared task of cultural production. This sharing in actual things makes relationships *finite* and *exclusive*, but at the same time, provides a space of sameness and trust where individuals can come to rely on one another.

However, the overall picture this gives is a certain confidence in the "overlapping" of people: So long as people share in cultural life, they can be friends; so long as they share in communal lifestyle, then they can have the camaraderie of neighbors; and so on. However, can everything really be shared? When a man and a woman come together as husband and wife, can they fully overcome their gender differences and come to a total

understanding of each other? Is this not the *totalizing* that Irigaray and McCarthy were trying to guard against?

There are three particular discussions in Watsuji that I think ought to be examined in this regard. First is Watsuji's view of the relationship of husband and wife. Second is his view of language. Third, and most importantly, is his view of death in response to Martin Heidegger.

3.1 Husband and Wife

Let me quickly go through the first two. In the second volume of *Ethics*, Watsuji discusses the two-person relationship as the foundation of the various stages of *Sittlichkeit* (interpersonal ethical life). The couple is the starting point of the stages that encompass all of human life, from the family, to local communities, to cultural communities, and to various nation-states. Interestingly, for Watsuji, it is the couple and not the individual person that is the starting point of ethical life, simply because it is impossible (except in extreme cases) for an individual to even survive in complete isolation from others.³¹

For Watsuji, the couple is characterized by two key elements: total participation, and total exclusivity. Total participation is an entrusting of body and mind—in both the shared labors and sexuality of the body, and the shared thoughts and desires of the mind. And for Watsuji, this participation has no room for secrets or spaces between this I and thou. He writes:

When a community of two people is formed in this kind of mutual participation, this mutual participation permeates into the existence (*sonzai*) of the two people, and that makes them into one communal existence. . . . Every nook and cranny of the two

³¹ *WTZ10*, 335-336.

persons is formed. In the space between these two, “self” (*watakushi*) can no longer exist.³²

Is it healthy, or even possible, for two people to merge to this extent? Is it possible to share in everything, keeping no secrets, expressing every desire and fear, such that two people literally become one? Does this not stamp out the differences between individuals in a couple? And what of those differences that are indelible—like those of gender and sexuality?

Watsuji himself recognizes the importance of sexuality, writing, “One can say that opposition’s most general [form] is the two sexes, male and female. This most concisely illustrates the movement toward unity within opposition, becoming one within two, that is the dynamicity of human existence.”³³ While his recognition of this opposition is commendable, his attempt to unify them is unsatisfying: “What we can draw out from the unity of a couple is the *complementary* relationship between husband and wife. This has been understood as a *yin-yang* relationship since olden times . . .”³⁴ He then goes on to describe how men are in charge of “outward facing” roles like labor and defense, and how women are in charge of “inward facing” roles like supporting and consoling her husband.

While this sexism is in keeping with Georg Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and even Nishida Kitarô’s *An Inquiry into the Good*, what is more worrisome is

³² *Ibid.*, 337. 二人共同体がこのような相互参与において成り立つとき、この相互参与は二人の存在を浸透し、それを一つの共同的存在ならしめる。...存在のどのすみずみもが二人にとって形成せられる。このような二人の間にあつては、「私」はもはやどこにも存することができぬ。

³³ *Ibid.*, 341. 対立の最も一般的なものは男女の両性であると言ってよい。それは対立において合一に動き、二において一となる、という人間存在の動性を、最も端的に示したものである。

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 379. 夫婦の和合の道としてあらわに説かれ得るのは、夫婦の間の補足的関係である。これは古くより陰陽の関係として把握せられていたものであつて...

that in this foundational relationship, Watsuji has obliterated all difference, and the indelible differences of gender are explained away functionally. In his “unity within opposition,” unity cleanly resolves all opposition. This is something criticized even by William LaFleur, who is usually supportive of Watsuji’s ideas: “This motif of defining social relationships in a way that obviates things that are ‘confrontational’ or ‘oppositional’ is one that runs throughout the *Ethics*.”³⁵

3.2 Language

This trend continues in his discussion of language. Language plays a crucial role for Watsuji. His very approach to ethics is hermeneutic, and part of this hermeneutic method is his analysis of the etymologies of words like *rinri*, *ningen*, *sonzai* and *seken*. Furthermore, language is for him the very ground of cultural products and cultural production. The boundaries of language *define* the ethnos—which is, for better or worse, the historical subject for Watsuji’s philosophy of inter-national history. But how does Watsuji see language?

Linguistic activity is the expression of this [capacity for] mutual understanding. Therefore, in this there is already a “matter” (*koto*) that is mutually understood, and that “matter” is divided and unified within linguistic activity.³⁶

For Watsuji, we do not communicate in order to understand each other. We communicate because we already understand each other. Hence, a lot of communication is much more subtle than Habermasian rational discourse. For instance, Watsuji gives the

³⁵ William R. LaFleur, “An Ethics of As-Is: State and Society in the Rinrigaku of Watsuji Tetsurō,” in *La société civile face à l’État dans les traditions chinoise, japonaise, coréenne et vietnamienne*, ed. L. Vandermeersch (Paris: Études thématiques 3, École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1994), 458.

³⁶ WTZ10, 529. 言語活動はこの相互了解性の表現である。従ってそこにはすでに相互の間に了解せられている「こと」があり、その「こと」が言語活動において分割せられつつ統一せられる。

examples of finishing each other's sentences, leaving things unsaid, subtle hints, gestures and glances, and so on. But what about all the times when we do not understand each other? Or, not uncommonly, when we pretend to understand each other even though we have completely lost each other's train of thought? Watsuji says that while many works of art and literature depict the tragedies that arise from a failure to have an intuitive understanding of the other, the fact that these are seen as *tragedies* means that mutual understanding is primordial, and the subjective states of persons are visible to the other to a considerable extent.³⁷

Watsuji by no means overestimates the power of language—his own struggles with the German language made him quite pessimistic about the very idea of inter-cultural communication and translation.³⁸ But he does seem to overestimate the seamlessness of the “mother tongue”—and I think given the realizations of post-structuralism, we have reason to be wary of this.

3.3 Being-toward-Death between Heidegger and Watsuji

The excesses of Watsuji's confidence in totality are found all throughout his ethical works, with a particularly high concentration in the first two volumes of *Ethics*. The marginalization of individual-initiated social change in the first volume, a view of the state with no mechanism for feedback from the citizens (which even Hegel made room for)—the list goes on. But I think the most damning is his continuing critique of Martin Heidegger's

³⁷ Ibid., 528-529.

³⁸ See Inaga Shigemi, “Japanese Philosophers Go West: The Effect of Maritime Trips on Philosophy in Japan with Special Reference to the Case of Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960),” *Japan Review* 25 (2013): 113-144.

idea of being-toward-death which spans the first two volumes of *Ethics*. As this is the central idea of this paper, allow me to begin by discussing Heidegger's ideas in some detail.

Watsuji's critique of Heidegger centers on the "asociality" of Heidegger's notion of authenticity. Despite the presence of ideas like "others," "being-with," and "solicitude," Heidegger's critique of "the They" (*das Man*) through the idea of authentic being-toward-death seems to overshadow these social ideas with a strong sense of solitariness. Let us begin with the idea of "the They."

The They or the herd is how people usually view others, as a whole that they are dissolved into. The They is what people measure themselves against, the status quo that becomes their measure for themselves. The They is what people conform to, and it shapes their tastes, fears, and attitudes toward the world. However, for Heidegger, the They takes away our capacity to make decisions for ourselves and to own up to the decisions we make. "Thus the particular Dasein in its everydayness is *disburdened* by the 'they'."³⁹ As such, there is a need to retrieve oneself from the They: "The Self of everyday Dasein is the They-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [*eigens ergriffenen*]. As they-self, the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the 'they', and must first find itself."⁴⁰ It is in this self-recovery that being-toward-death plays a crucial role.

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 127. I am using the standard pagination, and I have also referred to the new translation:

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, rev. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

Technically, one never “experiences” death—if one did, one would be dead. One only sees death around, but that is not one’s own death. But, despite our not having an experience of death, death is ever present. As soon as we are born, we are old enough to die. Hence, this non-experience is imminent and inescapable, a non-experience that perpetually disturbs the center of experience that is *Dasein*.⁴¹ This imminent possibility of no-longer-being is *mine*. Heidegger writes:

No one can take the Other’s dying away from him. Of course someone can ‘go to his death for another’. But that always means to sacrifice oneself for the other ‘in some definite affair’. Such “dying for” can never signify that the Other has thus had his death taken away in even the slightest degree. Dying is something that every *Dasein* itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it ‘is’ at all.⁴²

As something that belongs to each person and each person alone, death is something that reveals the totality of an individual’s existence. It demarcates the proper limit of an individual, and, as the possibility of ceasing to be-in-the-world, it brings to the fore that individual’s very existence as being-in-the-world. Heidegger expresses this in a very controversial paragraph:

With death, *Dasein* stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer being-able-to-be-there. If *Dasein* stands before itself as this possibility, it has been *fully* assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other *Dasein* have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one.⁴³

As such, a willingness to face the possibility of one’s own death is for Heidegger something that individuates *Dasein*, takes him away from her slumber amongst the They and

⁴¹ Ibid., 245.

⁴² Ibid., 240.

⁴³ Ibid., 250.

rouses her to his own being-in-the-world. It is through this anticipatory resoluteness that *Dasein* becomes *authentic*.⁴⁴

While Watsuji makes use of many of Heidegger's analyses, and even uses Heidegger's notion of the They in his own critique against collectivism (in demanding for a continuous movement of negation), his view of Heidegger's notion of authenticity is generally critical. Heidegger's notion of authenticity and the strictly individual character of death and one's relationship with it seem to push all of his more relational notions (the Others, being-with, solicitude) to the wayside, and this is something that Watsuji clearly takes him to task for in chapter 2.5 of *Ethics*.

For Watsuji, an individual's death alone cannot be something that reveals the totality of a human being and its proper limit. While death is a limit that demarcates the human being, it is not the only limit, and, for Watsuji, it definitely is not the most important one. He writes:

We cannot have access to the totality of *ningen sonzai* only through death as an end. This totality is, first of all, to be found beyond the totality of individual being and only in and through the infinite oppositions and unities of these latter totalities. Therefore, the totality of *ningen*, although inclusive of "being in its death," is also that totality that goes beyond death.⁴⁵

For Watsuji, the true limit that inscribes the individual is the totality of *ningen*. As such, coming to terms with its "ownmost potentiality for being" must be by way of the totality of *ningen*, and not merely death. Against Heidegger, Watsuji writes: "What Heidegger calls *authenticity* is, in reality, inauthenticity. And when this in-authenticity becomes further negated through the nondual relation of self and other, that is to say,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 262-263.

⁴⁵ *WTZ10*, 236 (224).

when the ‘self’ becomes annihilated, only then is authenticity realized.”⁴⁶ He continues, “We are now able to call this totality of *ningen* the *authentic self*. But the authentic self in this case is the superindividual subject . . . The authentic self must consist in the nondual relation of the self and other.”⁴⁷

Watsuji insists that this self-negation is not merely a return to the They (*das Man*), it is not a negation where one becomes “an averaged individual deprived of his unique characteristics.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, for Watsuji, as a mere individual, preparedness for death cannot be all that important. “The self-realization of the finitude of an individual being is of no significance by itself. It acquires its significance only when it paves the way to the supraindividual.”⁴⁹ He elaborates this further, saying:

As a spontaneous abandonment of the self, [preparedness for death] paves the way for the nondual relation between the self and other and terminates in the activity of benevolence. Because of this, it reveals for the first time the original countenance of *ningen*.⁵⁰

In summary, for Watsuji, Heidegger remains within the sphere of individualism, failing to see the limit of the individual beyond its own death, and failing to see how this limit has to do with the absolute totality, which is humankind as a whole. In contrast, Watsuji sets up the totality of *ningen* as the limit of the individual. In the face of this totality, the “anticipatory resoluteness” toward death is no longer individualistic. Rather, preparedness for death is a letting go of the self and opening up to the nondual relationship

⁴⁶ Ibid., 237 (225).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 237 (226).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 238 (226)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

with others. Authentic existence is thus possible, not as the authentic individual, but the authentic surrender to totality beyond death.

Watsuji nails the coffin shut in the second volume of *Ethics*, where he writes:

A singular existence in which others are absolutely incapable of participating in does not exist anywhere. The view, often asserted in recent times, that sees existence that includes death as this sort [of a singular existence] cannot be said to be true. The other can participate even in death. . . . Rather, death must be said to be the most public phenomenon in which everyone can participate.⁵¹

A thing that absolutely lacks publicness, that is, a thing that is essentially private, does not exist.⁵²

The whole idea of inalienable alterity or of singularity seems to have been completely rejected by Watsuji's work.

4 Hints from Poststructuralism

Sakai Naoki's extended critique of Watsuji in *Translation and Subjectivity* has two pillars: First, Watsuji's cultural nationalism and the idea of a seamless cultural totality, and second (and directly correlative of that), the very lack of singularity we have discussed above. In Watsuji's desire to posit the harmonious whole of Japan, not only does he ignore the "imaginary" character of the Japanese nation, he argues for a smoothly nesting series of human organizations in wherein individuals are completely submerged in various

⁵¹ Ibid., 332-333. 絶対に他者の参与し得ないような特異の存在はどこにも存せぬ。近時しばしば主張せられるように死を含む存在をかかるとみることも決して正しいとは言えない。死といえども他者の参与し得るものである。…むしろ死は万人の参与し得る最も公共的な現象であるというべきであろう。

⁵² Ibid., 333. 絶対的に公共性を欠くもの、すなわち本質上私的なものは存しない。

roles.⁵³ But this is to ignore the singular abundance of each person—that excess that remains uncaptured by the countless roles we partake in and lingers in the conflict between our various roles—and subordinate the individual to an ethics of *nakayoshi* (“getting along”). Sakai comes to a startling conclusion:

It is often said that, in contrast to the Heideggerian *Dasein* analysis, Watsuji’s ethics is much more attentive to, and even perceptive of, the sociality of the human being. My reading is diametrically opposed to that. What is absent in Watsuji’s anthropology is the very concern for sociality. Even as a common word, sociality connotes much more than the relationality of subjective positions. Normally, we do not ascribe sociality to a person who can only operate within prearranged social relations such as parent-child and teacher-student. Sociality is understood to mean the ability to leave behind the sort of trust warranted by the already existing relations, to “go out in the world” and to establish new relations with strangers.⁵⁴

Sakai describes this “antisocial ethics” as the very ethics of *immanence* that Jean-Luc Nancy criticizes, a view of society that is incapable of seeing a “being-in-common” where singularities open up to each other without being absorbed into each other.⁵⁵

In order to fully unpack this critique, I want to bring up two contemporary philosophers who responded to this same problem in Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death: Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Nancy. Both of these French philosophers were students of Heidegger and were deeply influenced by his project. But, like Watsuji, both of

⁵³ While I generally agree with Sakai’s critique of Watsuji’s ignoring “role strain” and the outsiders *inside* society (Agamben’s *homo sacer*), I do not think Watsuji was *ignorant* of these concerns. For instance, Yano Satoji points out that in “Dogeza,” Watsuji was keenly aware of the gaze of prostitutes and other people *inside* the village who did not fit in the moral order of the community. This shows that he was aware that communities do not nest as clearly as his schema might make it seem. But the direct acknowledgment of these conflicts did not appear until *Ethics III*, and it was not structurally addressed.

See Yano Satoji, “Sekai shimin no sahô toshite no kantai to tomurai no manâ: Watsuji Tetsurô no ‘Dogeza’ wo tôshite,” *Manâ to sahô no ningengaku* (Tokyo: Tôshindô, 2014).

⁵⁴ Sakai Naoki, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 96.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 101, 142.

them saw the need for prioritizing the ethical and inter-human. Perhaps by examining them, we can find some hints as to how to deal with these excesses in Watsuji's thought.

4.1 Emmanuel Levinas

Levinas has a lot in common with Watsuji. Like Watsuji did in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, Levinas argues against Heidegger that it is not ontology but *ethics* that is *first philosophy*. And, like Watsuji's notion of *aidagara*, he tries to show how my consciousness is fundamentally determined by the "other." A few scholars like Leah Kalmanson and Joel Krueger have caught on to this similarity, pointing out connections between Watsuji and Levinas in topics like relationality, otherness, and embodiment.⁵⁶ But for our discussion, I intend to take the opposite tack: In many ways, Levinas' response to Heidegger's being-toward-death goes in the opposite direction as Watsuji's!

In the essay "Dying for . . .," Levinas responds to Heidegger. While he recapitulates the importance of Heidegger's thought, he points out the scandal of the idea of authenticity:

I have already stressed, at the beginning of my remarks—before my attempt to retrace some of the movements characteristic of the phenomenology and ontology of *Sein und Zeit*—the alternative between, on the one hand, the identical in its authenticity, in its *own right* or its unalterable *mine* of the human, in its *Eigentlichkeit*, independence and freedom, and on the other hand being as human devotion to the other, in a responsibility which is also an election, a principle of identification and an appeal to an *I*,

⁵⁶ Leah Kalmanson, "Levinas in Japan: the Ethics of Alterity and the Philosophy of No-self," *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010): 193-206.

Joel Krueger, "The Space Between Us: Embodiment and Intersubjectivity in Watsuji and Levinas," in *Levinas and Asian Thought*, ed. by Leah Kalmanson, Frank Garrett, and Sarah Mattice, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2013), 53-78.

the non-interchangeable, the unique. . . . *Eigentlichkeit* to which all the meaningful can be traced. Primordial importance is attached to *one's own being*.⁵⁷

The idea of authenticity seems curiously self-involved, concerned with its own being. And the idea that, in the face of death, “all of the relations with the other have been undone,” seems to privilege one’s own authenticity over one’s responsibility to the other.

Particularly repugnant for Levinas is Heidegger’s treatment of sacrifice. As I have quoted above, Heidegger points out that even in dying for the other, I die my own death and the other dies his/hers. For Levinas, this is technically correct—but it misses the point of sacrifice completely.

‘To die for...’ appears to [Heidegger] only as a ‘simple sacrifice’, and without ‘death for the other person’ being able in truth to release the other person from death, and without challenging the truth of ‘everyone dies for himself’. The ethics of sacrifice does not succeed in shaking the rigor of being and the ontology of the authentic.⁵⁸

Does not the relationship to the other in sacrifice, in which the death of the other preoccupies the human *being-there* before his own death, indicate precisely a beyond ontology—or a before ontology—while at the same time also determining—or revealing—a responsibility for the other, and through that responsibility a human ‘I’ that is neither the substantial identity of a subject nor the *Eigentlichkeit* in the ‘mineness’ of being?⁵⁹

In dying for another, one dies one’s own death and the other dies his, but this is not the issue at all. The issue is no longer one’s own authenticity, nor the mineness of one’s own resoluteness and authenticity. The center is no longer *Dasein* in the order of ontology. But precisely it is a decentering, an otherwise than being, where the concern is the other.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 211.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

At first glance, the critique of the self-centeredness of authenticity seems similar to Watsuji. But the key difference here is that, for Watsuji, death is still about totality, about being:

So long as the state is a *sittliche* organization, its endangerment (*kikyû*) is an endangerment of the way of *Sittlichkeit*. Bravery that [seeks to] rescue it is truly heroism (*giyû*) as *moral (dôgi no) bravery*. . . . In ancient Greece, they called defending to the death one's station in the polis "bravery." In heroism, a person can experience to the fullest the truth of *ningen sonzai*: emptying the self and living in the totality.⁶⁰

Setting aside the (problematic) relationship of the citizen and the state for the next chapter, we see here that death opens up the individual to the *undying* totality, the "we" (*ware ware*) in which the individual finds its eternal significance. And this is by no means a mere wartime expediency: Watsuji was consistent on this point ever since *Milieu*. He writes,

People die; their relations change: but through this unending death and change, people live and their relations continue. These *continue* incessantly through *ending* incessantly. In the individual's eyes, it is a case of "being-toward-death," but from the standpoint of society it is "being-toward-life."⁶¹

This is in contrast with Levinas' idea of response or sacrifice as dislocation, a rupture of the I that is not escaped into the solidity of a "we." In one of his most important works, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas describes this service to the other as *substitution*:

⁶⁰ WTZ10, 622. 国家が人倫的組織である限り、その危急は人倫の道の危急であり、それを救うための勇氣はまさしく道義の勇氣として義勇である。…ギリシアの昔には国家におけるおのが持ち場を死守することが勇氣と呼ばれた。人はこの義勇において己れを空じ全体性に生きるという人間存在の真理を最高度に体験することができる。

⁶¹ Watsuji, *Fûdo*, 19-20 (10). Translation emended. 人は死に、人の間は変わる、しかし絶えず死に変わりつつ、人は生き人の間は続いている。それは絶えず終わることにおいて絶えず続くのである。個人の立場から見て「死への存在」であることは、社会の立場からは「生への存在」である。

Substitution is signification. Not a reference from one term to another, as it appears thematized in the said, but substitution as the very subjectivity of a subject, interruption of the irreversible identity of the essence. It occurs in the taking charge of, which is incumbent on me without any escape possible. Here, the unicity of the ego first acquires a meaning—where it is no longer the question of the ego but of me. . . . As a substitution of one for another, as me, a man, I am not a transubstantiation, a changing from one substance into another, I do not shut myself up in another identity, I do not rest in a new avatar. As signification, proximity, saying, separation, I do not fuse with anything.⁶²

Thus, my dying opens me up to the other, but the other remains other, and my death remains my own. I am not resurrected in the totality nor do I take over the other's death. Sacrifice remains purely sacrifice, without being sublated into an everlasting life. As such, while in Levinasian ethics relationality is front and center as well, it is a very different sort of relationality. It is characterized by asymmetry, rather than by a symmetric sharing of common factors. And responsibility is a relating that is never an overlap, always tempered by the otherness of the other.

4.2 Jean-Luc Nancy

On one hand, Levinas is essential in giving voice to that very doubt we raised at the beginning of this essay: He brings the problem of the otherness of the other to the very center of ethics. This is something that Watsuji misses with the excesses of his notion of *aidagara*. Along with the idea of the irrevocable mine-ness of death in Heidegger, Watsuji rejected the possibility that there could remain something completely other even in the most intimate relationship.

⁶² Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 13-14.

However, is there not something lacking in Levinas as well? While his phenomenology of alterity rings true, is there not also an element of “we” that is real to our experience of responsibility, despite the otherness of the other? Despite the insurmountable asymmetry of the ethical relation, is there not a sense of community that relates *positively* with the very experience of finitude? As Sakai’s critique suggests, it is in response to these questions that I think Jean-Luc Nancy is most insightful. But he is useful not merely for criticizing Watsuji: Perhaps Nancy might bring us closer to something possible within Watsuji’s ethics of *aidagara*.

In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy tries to describe a middle way between the excesses of community and the solitude of authentic *Dasein*. He refers to the idea that the community or the individual can be an identity—a substance, something that rests in itself like a closed system—as “immanence.” He criticizes the idea of the immanent individual in various Western notions of subjectivity, and rather suggests the idea of *singularity*:

Singularity never has the nature or the structure of individuality. Singularity never takes place at the level of atoms, those identifiable if not identical identities; rather it takes place at the level of the *clinamen*, which is unidentifiable. It is linked to ecstasy: one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no “subject”—but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being.⁶³

While a singularity is unique, an origin in itself, irreducible to any other (like Levinas’ other), a singularity does not exist in itself. It only exists in opening to and touching other singularities: an inclining (*clinamen*), an *ek-stasis*. This is the original plurality—plus, more than itself—of the singularity that opens it to community.

⁶³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7.

However, Nancy also criticizes the idea of the immanent community. He begins his criticism by pointing out a tendency in the modern period beginning with Rousseau toward a nostalgia for “lost community,” an ideal form of community that is thought to have existed and needs to be recovered. Nancy describes it as follows:

The lost, or broken, community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways, by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy. . . . Community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence.⁶⁴

Somehow, one cannot help but recognize this sort of nostalgia in Watsuji, in his yearning for *Gemeinschaft*, in his constant praise of undisturbed harmony (as Sakai indicates). But for Nancy, this lost community is nothing but a myth; it has never actually existed in reality. At every period in history, people have pined nostalgically for this mythic past community and the utopia of its immanence. But there is no such thing as a community where singularities lose their singular separateness and are completely dissolved into each other, sharing one life, one destiny, and one death. Such a community can only be faked, and the attempt to create a communal identity, a communion such as this, is not only delusive but fundamentally murderous.

Political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death. Immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it. Thus the logic of Nazi Germany was not only that of the extermination of the other . . . but also, effectively, the logic of sacrifice aimed at all those in the “Aryan” community who did not satisfy the criteria of pure immanence . . .⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

Watsuji falls headfirst into this murderous myth, with the idea of death as “the most public phenomenon in which everyone (*bannin*) can participate” sounding dangerously similar to “the honorable death of one hundred million” (*ichioku gyokusai*) that became a slogan shortly after the publication of *Ethics II*, from 1943 to 1945, at the height of Japan’s desperate war.⁶⁶

In opposition to this myth of immanent community, Nancy intones the idea of “inoperative” or unworked community. Nancy writes:

Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence. Consequently, community is transcendence: but “transcendence,” which no longer has any “sacred” meaning, signifying precisely a resistance to immanence (resistance to the communion of everyone or to the exclusive passion of one or several: to all the forms and all the violences of subjectivity).⁶⁷

In the previous sub-section, we discussed how singularity, in opposition to subjectivity, is one that fundamentally opens toward others. Singularity is fundamentally ecstatic and transcendent. But community is not something that is formed *consequent* to the opening of singularities, as if to envelop these exposed singularities into a new communal subject. Instead, unworked community is none other than this opening, this shared exposure itself. It is nothing other than the liminal space wherein singularities transcend their subjectivity, expose themselves and touch each other. It is a “spacing,” a zone of transcendence, with no substantiality, no originary solidity, no essence, and no immanence. “It is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*. It is the community of *others*. . . .

⁶⁶ Similarly, Morimura criticizes Watsuji as unable to address the problem of how we relate with each other *vis-à-vis* our deaths and how we relate with the dying and the dead. Here, he compares Watsuji not with Nancy but with another kindred thinker: Alphonso Lingis and his idea of the community of those who have nothing in common. See Morimura Osamu, “‘Kû’ no rinri wa, ‘nanimō kyōyūshiteinai monotachi no kyōdōtai’ no rinri ni nari uru ka?: Watsuji Tetsurō rinrigaku no genkai,” *Ibunka ronbunhen* 11 (2010): 213-251.

⁶⁷ Nancy, 35.

Community therefore occupies a singular place: it assumes the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being in the form of a subject.”⁶⁸ Another image Nancy offers is that of sharing (*partage*):

The *sharing (partage)* of community and the sovereignty in the sharing or *shared sovereignty*, shared *between Daseins*, between singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation—the sharing itself—is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication as this is understood to exist between subjects. But these singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced*, by the sharing that makes them *others*: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of the sharing: “communicating” by not “communing.” These “places of communication” are no longer places of fusion, even though in them one passes from one to the other; they are defined and exposed by their dislocation. Thus, the communication of sharing would be this very dis-location.⁶⁹

Inoperative community is then that fundamental space where the transcendence, touching, and sharing of people take place. It is between the immanent subject and the immanent community, but it is a transcendence that refuses them both. It is a space where being is both singular, as it is located in particular centers of meaning that are irreducible to each other, but at the same time plural, that is defined by a “plus,” a transcendence by which these singular centers are more than themselves, constituted by reaching out and touching each other.⁷⁰ “It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)—a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition. What is exposed in compearance [co-appearing] is the following . . . ‘you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I’. Or again, more simply: *you shares me*.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁰ See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁷¹ Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 29.

Nancy's vision of community is most clear in relation to his take on being-toward-death. Nancy scholar Ian James offers a key to this, explaining that Nancy's interpretation is one that wrestles with the tension between Heidegger's view of being-toward-death and Bataille's view of death and community.⁷² For Heidegger, death is something that we can never experience. No matter how many times we accompany the dying, the other's death remains the other's, and one's death remains one's own. On the other hand, for Bataille, it is "exclusively in the death of others that our mortality is revealed." After all, if we never saw another person, another being, die, would we even know that we are mortal, too? However, these two understandings are not irreconcilable for Nancy:

I recognize that in the death of the other there is nothing recognizable. And this is how sharing—and finitude—can be inscribed: "The ending implied in death does not signify a *Dasein's* Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-toward-the-end* of this entity." The similitude of the like-being is made in the encounter of "beings toward the end" that his end, *their* end, in each case "mine" (or "yours"), *assimilates and separates in the same limit*, at which or on which they compear.⁷³

The encounter with the dying other is an essential rupture in multiple ways: First, when I encounter the dying other, I realize that this death is not my death, this death is something I cannot experience, I cannot appropriate. I experience the irreducible otherness of the dying other *within* my own consciousness as a disruption. This is the experience of the alterity of the other. Second, I realize that I too am capable of dying, a "possibility of impossibility," a mortal wound within subjectivity. This is my experience of the "alteration that 'in me' sets my singularity outside me and infinitely delimits it."⁷⁴ And third, I realize that while I am being-toward-death, the other is also being-toward-death. This

⁷² Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 180.

⁷³ Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

similarity makes us one, and that means I cannot ignore the death of the other. But fourth, at the same time, because my death is irreducible to the death of the other and vice versa, this unity of shared being-toward-death is not an identity that I can assimilate. It is something I cannot ignore but I cannot absorb into the order of my own worldly concerns. To use Watsuji's Zen terminology, perhaps this is the true non-duality of self and other (*jita-funi*), in which self and other are neither one nor two.

In other words, the experience of death, your death, my death, our death, is an experience of the true sense of unworked community. Nancy writes:

Sharing comes down to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself. Which does not mean my existence reinvested in or by community, as if community were another subject that would sublimate me, in a dialectical or communal mode. *Community does not sublimate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition.* It is the community of finite beings, and as such it is itself a *finite* community. . . . A community of finitude, because finitude "is" communitarian, and because finitude alone is communitarian.⁷⁵

Death reveals none other than the sharing of finitude that is singular (irreducibly individual) and plural (transcending each individual, pushing him outside himself in *ek-stasis*), that is inoperative community. And the proto-ethical demand he calls "literature" is none other than the reinscription of this shared finitude, in which we face our limit, alone, together, in authentic resoluteness toward being-toward-death and in responsibility for the dying other.

5 Re-thinking Watsuji and the Passion of *Aidagara*

Watsuji's emphasis on relationality as the center of ethics is a very important contribution to the thinking of ethics in Japan and across the globe. But this emphasis on relationality

⁷⁵ Ibid., 26-27.

tended toward excess. Watsuji seems to overestimate the ability to share even things like death and the very finitude of the individual; thus, subsuming the relata completely within their relations. This was made clear in Watsuji's rejection of Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. But as we have seen in Levinas, a focus on relationality does not necessarily have to give up a sense of alterity. As a matter of fact, it is possible to draw an idea of relationality that is centered on that: "the infinite responsibility for the other." Also, one can even emphasize a community despite (or because of) this difference. In Nancy's idea of inoperative community, we explored the idea that, in the experience of limits (of which death is one facet), one simultaneously experiences a division and assimilation. My limits are mine alone, and so is the other's, but this very limit is what inclines us to each other to make a sense of togetherness possible. Thus, poststructuralism gives us an indication of what Watsuji might have been lacking in order to come up with the non-totalizing *aidagara* that McCarthy had hoped for.

However, the above seems like an "external critique" of Watsuji that merely imposes contemporary and often western views on a wartime Japanese philosopher. In this section, however, I wish to return to Watsuji's own discussions and show how Watsuji himself tries to account for these limits of relationality. And while he does not foreground alterity (and perhaps was even averse to it), he himself could not simply ignore it.

5.1 Returning to and from Emptiness

As McCarthy mentioned, Watsuji's notion of relationality is tied to his notion of emptiness. Usually, Watsuji refers to emptiness as the emptiness of individuals—allowing them to return to absolute totality. In the introduction of *Ethics I*, he writes:

An individual becomes an individual by negating emptiness (i.e., authentic emptiness) as her own fundamental source. This is the self-negation of absolute negativity. In addition to that, an individual must be subordinate to society through emptying herself, regardless of how this emptying is performed. This means that emptiness is materialized in various associations to varying degrees. Therefore, an individual returns to 'emptiness' itself, through engaging in association of whatever sort.⁷⁶

Thus, the return to emptiness can be seen as a totalizing movement within relational existence, wherein individuals are gathered into the non-duality of self and other (*jita funi*) in emptiness as absolute totality. However, there is another use of emptiness in *Ethics I* which seems to express something similar to the alterity that poststructuralists and feminists suggest:

It is not that great religious people in ancient times, to say nothing of Jesus Christ and Gaotama Buddha themselves, taught us to return directly to the absolute without thereby going through the socio-ethical whole. *It is true that they stood firmly on an individualist standpoint, by leaving behind the palace (like Buddha) or by abandoning their family (like Jesus). Their enlightenment or faith was acquired outside of the socio-ethical organization, in the forest or in the wilderness.* When the absolute was revealed to them, were they satisfied simply by submerging themselves in it? Not at all. Instead, they returned into the midst of the socio-ethical organization, expounded a 'new social ethics' or established a society of priests as an ideal yet typical socio-ethical organization.⁷⁷ [emphases mine]

While Watsuji insists on the need to return to society, we see here an interesting, reverse view of emptiness: The realization of the absolute, of emptiness, is *individualizing*. It is something that the individual approaches alone. This is further clarified by the following:

⁷⁶ WTZ10, 123-124 (116-117). 個人は、己れの本源たる空（すなわち本来空）の否定として、個人となるのである。それは絶対的否定性の自己否定にほかならない。しかもこのような個人は、いかなる仕方にもしろ、とにかく己れを空じて社会に服属しなくてはならぬ。それはさまざまな種類の結合においてそれぞれの程度に空を実現することである。だから個人は何らかの結合を実現するというを媒介として「空」そのものの方向に帰る。

⁷⁷ Ibid., 129 (122). しかし、キリストや釈迦を初め古代の偉大な宗教家は、個人の立場から直接に、人倫的全体を通ずることなく、絶対者の中に還ることを教えたのではない。なるほど彼らもまた王城を脱けいで家族を捨てて個人の立場に立った。彼らの悟りあるいは信仰は、人倫的組織の外で、森林や荒野において、得られた。が、彼らにおいて絶対者が明らかになったとき、彼らはただその中に没入することで満足したか。否、彼らは人倫的組織のただ中に帰って、そこに「新しき人倫」を説き、あるいは模範的な人倫組織としての僧伽を形成したのである。

Where an individual who revolted against a family or a state, finds himself based in the Absolute, then by what right can a family or a state, as finite wholes, demand the negation of this individual? Even the prosperity of the state, insofar as the state is but a finite group of human beings, is not given priority over the dignity of an individual who originates in the Absolute.⁷⁸

What we see here is that the idea of emptiness can point to both the totalizing movement toward relational totality, or to the individualizing movement toward the singularity of the other. (I will develop these multiple readings of emptiness in full in the next chapter.)

5.2 Cultural Products and Production

In the wartime volume of *Ethics*, Watsuji first discusses the idea of collective change—at least restricted within culture. For Watsuji, all culture has to do with the absolute: Art has to do with the expression of formless form. Scholarship (or science) has to do with expressing the absolute as truth. Religion has to do with the return to the absolute in consciousness and feeling. Most of his discussion of art, scholarship, and religion is centered on cultural *products* that are specific to a particular historico-cultural ethnos. These various products contained the aesthetic, ontological, and religious expressions of the absolute that bind a community in shared cultural values.

However, there is another side to culture for Watsuji—cultural *production*. And in cultural production, it is the *individual* who returns to the absolute by him/herself, in order to breathe new life into artistic expression, in order to seek out unsolved problems in science, and in order to express the very verity of the absolute in religious experience.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., 130 (123). 家族や国家から背き出た個人が、己れの根源を絶対者において自覚してる場合、単に有限的な全体に過ぎない家族や国家が、いかなる権利によってその個人の否定を要求し得るであろうか。国家の存続繁栄というごときことも、その国家が単に有限な人間団体に過ぎない限り、絶対者に根ざせる個人の尊厳より重いものではない。

⁷⁹ For example, see Ibid., 520, 551, 560.

This explains his use of figures like Jesus and Buddha in *Ethics I*, and corroborates the movement of a singularity returning to emptiness in order to creatively contribute to culture. (We will discuss this notion of culture more fully in Chapters III and VI.)

5.3 The Prophet

In the post-war volume of *Ethics*, Watsuji speaks of the leaders—or prophets—who guide society to how it ought to be. It is only through the rebellion of these exceptional individuals that any progress—be it in culture or in society or in the state—is possible. But at the same time, these individuals are not just imposing their selfish will:

When an individual resolutely rebels against something that up to that point had held currency, and through strife and sacrifice finally manages to change the consciousness of totality, [it can be said that in this case,] that individual had become clearly conscious of something that had already been vaguely felt in collective consciousness (*zentai ishiki*), and ahead of the masses had tried to form things toward how they ought to be, thus leading collective consciousness to self-awareness.⁸⁰

“Strife and sacrifice”—even martyrdom. With this, we see that “selfless unity” between the individual and the whole is not always so harmonious, so seamless as that of an idealized husband and wife, completing each other’s sentences. In love, too, there are bitter arguments—and these attest to an alterity that lingers, not merely as an incomprehensibility, but as a creative fidelity to nothingness.

Looking at the two sides of emptiness, the dual-structure of products and production, and the process of social change, I think this tells us that, despite Watsuji’s overwhelming

⁸⁰ WTZ11, 64. ある個人が在来通用していたものに対して断乎として反逆し、戦いと犠牲とを通じてついに全体の意識を変えるに至ったということは、その個人が全体意識においてすでに漠然と感ぜられていたことを明白な意識にもたらし、それを衆に先んじてそのあるべき形にまで形成して見せることによって、全体意識を自覚に導いて行ったということなのである。

focus on totality and harmony, his tendency to presume the functional unity of the whole, and the excesses of his faith in the “sharing” within relationships, it is possible to see a post-structural moment that refuses closed totality as much as it refuses closed individuality, and *read it against* Watsuji’s own declaration of the impossibility of singularity in being-toward-death. The individual standing before emptiness is a *singularity*. But it is a relational singularity, a *relatum* irreducible to but inseparable from relation.

Thus, a possible reading of Watsuji would see the emptiness of *aidagarateki sonzai* not as a totalizing non-duality of self and other but as an emptiness that both “assimilates and divides at the same limit.” Here, while selflessness and genuine care require a return to emptiness, this return must be seen as singularizing, and can alienate one from the whole—sometimes leading to strife and tragedy, rather than collective harmony. This would perhaps be closer to the view that McCarthy suggests.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that Watsuji’s focus on *aidagara* is of key importance in contemporary discourses as a corrective to the individualistic and disembodied approaches of liberal forms of ethics. In this, Watsuji can be closely allied with the ethics of care and perhaps even feminism. However, a danger of this focus on relationality is a tendency to overestimate the ability of people to share in experiences. This weak point of Watsuji is clear especially if seen in comparison with poststructuralism. But at the end of this chapter, we have seen that this acknowledgment of the other is present, albeit in a suppressed form, in Watsuji’s own theories. This is particularly clear in the idea of emptiness, which both unites, but at the same time, separates people. Thus, it is *possible* to

read *aidagarateki sonzai* not as *aidagara=kyôdôtai*, but as a *partage* of singularity-in-relation.

However, what do these multiple readings of Watsuji tell us? Why is it that Watsuji seems to read *aidagara* as communal in some parts, but permit for singularity in others? What we see here is Watsuji wrestling with a dilemma within the very idea of *aidagara*. As we have mentioned in Section 1, he himself brought up the dilemma between *relata* and relations. But was he able to resolve this dilemma? What I hoped to demonstrate in this chapter is that he did *not* successfully resolve the dilemma between singularity and communality, resulting in inconsistencies and contradictions. Sometimes he effectively placed relations as the foundation of the *relata* (denying his own formulation of the dilemma). But other times, he maintained the tension between relations and *relata*. Furthermore, while McCarthy is right to see the possible readings of Watsuji, it is important to stress that these are *possible readings*, not highlighted by, and perhaps even resisted by, Watsuji himself.

In this chapter, we have begun to bring up inconsistencies and internal tensions even within Watsuji's core idea of relationality. In the succeeding chapters, let us examine the further manifestations of these dilemmas in the various dual-structures of *ningen sonzai*.

Chapter III.¹ The Balancing Act between Individuality and Totality

In Chapter I, we have examined Watsuji's *Ethics* as a systematic whole. But closer inspection has slowly yielded shifts, inconsistencies, and tensions within his work. This became clear in Chapter II, where we saw the shift between individuality as singularity-in-relation and as completely absorbed into relation. Taking our point of departure from singularity and relationality but moving beyond the I-Thou relationship, one might ask how Watsuji Tetsurô sees the relationship between an individual and the larger communities it finds itself in—particularly how the citizen relates with the state. This leads us to the core idea of Watsuji: the dual-structure of *ningen sonzai*.

As we have seen, in every book of his systematic ethics since the preparatory work in *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations* and *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, Watsuji pointed out that human existence is characterized by a dual-structure (*nijûkôzô*): it possesses both individuality (*kojinsei, kobetsusei*) and communality/totality (*kyôdôsei, zentaisei*). To try to grasp human existence from merely one of these facets (as in individualism and collectivism) is folly, and to be faithful to only one of these aspects at the exclusion of the other is to go against the fundamental principle of human existence. Every scholar trying to get anything positive out of Watsuji—from Kaneko Takezô and Yuasa

¹ An earlier version of this chapter has previously been published as “Watsuji’s Balancing Act: Changes in His Understanding of Individuality and Totality from 1937 to 1949,” *Journal of Japanese Philosophy* 2 (2014), 105-134.

Yasuo in Japan to David Dilworth, William LaFleur, and Leah Kalmanson in the West—has tried to expound on this dual-structure in order to express Watsuji’s core ethical insight. But despite the consistency of this core insight, things get much more complicated if one asks: What exactly does Watsuji mean by ‘individuality’ or ‘totality’? How do these two concepts function? How do they relate with one another? In this chapter, especially in contrast with Chapter I, I focus on the elements that *resist systematization* within Watsuji’s discourse—inconsistencies, shifts, and contradictions in this core idea.

Watsuji struggles with these more concrete inquiries from the very first volume of *Ethics*, and his definitions shift and slide with the second and the third volumes as well. In this paper, I will carefully examine the changing definitions of individuality and totality and their mutual negation across the pre-war, wartime, and post-war volumes of *Ethics*. I will then offer a preliminary interpretation of these shifts and contradictions. Finally, despite Watsuji’s inconsistencies, I examine how his core insight on the dual-structure of human existence might contribute to contemporary political-ethical debates.

1 Individuality and Totality in Pre-War *Ethics*

The idea of the dual-structure of human existence and its constituent moments—individuality and totality/communality—appear to have been on Watsuji’s mind from the very beginning of his shift to systematic ethics. In the opening chapter of *Milieu*, first drafted in 1929, he mentions how our experience of our climate (in this case, the cold) is not as individuals alone but as communities who share in greetings about the weather and in clothing and housing methods in response to our climate. He offers a preview of the dual-structure here: “By ‘ningen’ I mean not the individual (anthrôpos, homo, homme, etc.) but a person both in this individual sense and at the same time people in society, the

combination or the communality of persons. This dual-character is the essential nature of *ningen*.”²

Watsuji slowly built up this idea of the dual-structure in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, giving us a first taste of his famous (or infamous) hermeneutics of the etymologies of *rinri*, *ningen*, *seken*, and *sonzai*. He also discussed the various forms of the dual-structure in western ethical thought, from Aristotle’s view of political man to seeing the dual-structure in Kant (man as a means vs. man as an end), Hegel’s views of *Sittlichkeit*, and Marx’s retrieval of it. He also first connects the dual-structure to emptiness in this book.

However, this idea became central and fully developed only in the three volumes of *Ethics*, which I shall focus on in this Chapter. In this section, I wish to examine three main themes in the *first* volume of *Ethics*: First, emptying individuality and totality; second, the movement of negation; and third, the functioning of individuality and totality. Hopefully the discussion of these themes will lay the groundwork for understanding Watsuji’s position, as well as reveal the ambiguities of Watsuji’s ideas.³

1.1 Emptying Individuality and Totality

In examining the specifics of individuality and totality and how they function and interrelate, one would normally start with a preliminary definition of these terms. In the case

² Watsuji, *Fûdo*, 18 (8). Translation emended. ここに人間と呼ばれるのは単に「人」(anthrôpos, homo, homme, man, Mensch) ではない。それは「人」でもあるが、しかし同時に人々の結合あるいは共同態としての社会でもある。人間のこの二重性格が人間の根本的性格である。

³ And also, because this first volume is the only one available in English, it gives an indication as to how Watsuji tends to be “overread” in the Anglosphere.

of individuality, for instance, one might define it as “that which is demarcated by a body.” Or, “The individual is the subject of thinking.” Or perhaps, “the individual is that which experiences sensations and emotions.” However, in the section curiously entitled “The Individual Moment of Human Existence,” Watsuji opposes precisely such an attempt to substantially define individuality. He points out that one cannot necessarily see the boundary of the body as one that cuts off one individual from another—it may be the very thing that tethers them to each other, as is clear in the relationship of a mother and her child, and in sexual relations.⁴ The same is true for consciousness, emotions, appetites, and other facets of the subject. Watsuji takes up various everyday examples: standing in the cold with other people and grumbling about the chill, parents grieving over their lost child, a cheerful discussion amongst friends, looking at a wall and seeing it as a “wall,” etc. All of these examples point to the basic fact that, even in the subjective life of the individual, other people are always there, shaping how we encounter reality.⁵

What about totality or community? For instance, one might define totality or community substantially, by saying that “the totality is the unity that expresses itself in individual members.” Or for instance, “the family is the matrix from which family members come to be.” Interestingly, this way of speaking is likely to seem awkward compared to the previous attempts to define individuality. That tells us that it is much easier for us to substantialize the individual and see the whole as constructed from individuals, rather than the other way around. That, in itself, is symptomatic of the very thing that Watsuji sought to critique when he opened *Ethics* with the line: “The essential significance of the

⁴ *WTZ10*, 63-66 (61-62).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-83 (63-78).

attempt to describe ethics as the study of *ningen* consists in getting away from the misconception, prevalent in the modern world that conceives of ethics as a problem of individual consciousness *only*.”⁶

However, despite his critique of this individualistic way of thinking, Watsuji is as critical of substantializing totality as he is of substantializing individuality. For instance, while he points out that the family is a historical whole beyond the mere sum of its members, even a great historical house ceases to exist if all the members pass away.⁷ Not only does a totality like the family depend on the existence of its members, but it depends on their participation and commitment. “Even in a family in the present, parents and children, husbands and wives have ways of behavior that each must observe. If parents stop behaving as parents, children as children, wives as wives, and husbands as husbands, the family will be dissolved.”⁸ Thus, in the section entitled “The Total Moment of Human Existence,” the attempt to find footing in a substantial totality is perpetually frustrated with the recognition of its dependence on individuals.

So we see here that Watsuji’s strategy is precisely to *destabilize*, to empty the substantialization of individuality and totality. Thus, the only “definitions” possible are as follows:

In truth there is no other place at which one can land in one's search for individuality and independence of the consciousness of *I* except that of the negation of communal character. . . . The independent consciousness of *I* is acquired only when isolated from any connection at all with other consciousnesses. Just as we are able to abstractively produce an individual's consciousness of retention by wiping away all elements of betweenness, so our own selfhood is recognizable only at the extreme point where all

⁶ Ibid., 11 (9).

⁷ Ibid., 92-93 (87-88).

⁸ Ibid., 94-95 (89).

betweenness is eliminated. . . . Hence, individuality itself does not have an independent existence. Its essence is negation, that is emptiness.⁹

Individuality is thus merely an abstraction that allows the individual to become visible in a reality where what is real occurs in the meeting of individuality and communality. Similarly:

In searching for a whole within the family, which is the society most familiar to us, we come upon those individual elements that constitute it instead. The whole is, then, nothing more than a force that sets restrictions on these individuals. If this claim is valid, then we must conclude that no whole exists in and by itself.¹⁰

As with individuality, the essence of totality is negation—it is empty of self-existence.

Thus, what we see here is a refutation of the urge to found ethics on either the substantial individual or the substantial totality. Watsuji effectively sets two contradictory moments at the foundation of human existence and declares both of them as equally primordial. This is the genius of Watsuji, and most of those supportive of his thesis are supportive of precisely what I have outlined above. But the complicated part comes when we examine how Watsuji tries to bring together these contradictory moments within the unity of human existence.

1.2 The Movement of Negation

Human existence is made of two contrary moments. How then can we live authentically human lives without denying one or the other? As one might have surmised from the

⁹ Ibid., 84-85 (80).

¹⁰ Ibid., 96 (91).

above “definitions,” the dual-structure of human existence is rooted in negation. Negativity/emptiness is therefore something that individuality and totality have in common. By being true to emptiness, we can be true to both aspects of human existence.

As we shall examine in greater depth in Chapter V, this notion of “emptiness” as the negativity that binds individuality and totality is something that has both Buddhist and Hegelian roots. However, its development was gradual: In *Milieu*, Watsuji makes no mention of “emptiness” but he does use the term “absolute negativity” to see the relationship of the dual-structure.¹¹ The notion of absolute emptiness as lying at the foundation of subject and object, individual and totality, is first mentioned by name in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*.¹² But it is given its developed form and its dialectic is first expressed in *Ethics I*, with the following (lengthy) quote:

Now, that *ningen*’s *sonzai* is, fundamentally speaking, a movement of negation makes it clear that the basis of *ningen*’s *sonzai* is negation as such, that is, absolute negation. The true reality of an individual, as well as of totality, is “emptiness,” and this emptiness is the absolute totality. Out of this ground, from the fact that this emptiness is emptied, emerges *ningen*’s *sonzai* as a movement of negation. The negation of negation is the self-returning and self-realizing movement of the absolute totality that is precisely social ethics (*jinrin*, *Sittlichkeit*). Therefore, the basic principle of social ethics is the realization of totality (as the negation of negation) through the individual, (that is, the negation of totality).¹³

We see here that through the back and forth negative movement of individuality and totality, their ground, “emptiness,” is expressed. We thus see two moments to the movement of ethics:

One of these is the establishment of the individual as the other, over against totality. What is at stake here is the taking of a first step toward self-awareness. Apart from the self-awareness of an individual, there is no social ethics. The other moment is the individual’s surrender to the totality. This is what has been called the demand of the

¹¹ Watsuji, *Fûdo*, 20-21 (9).

¹² *WTZ9*, 35.

¹³ *WTZ10*, 26 (23).

superindividual will, or of total will. Without this surrender, there is also no social ethics.¹⁴

Thus, both individuality and totality are seen as essential to ethics, and their mutual negation and realization allows for ethics to be expressed.

But, at this point, one might sense a confusion regarding how to logically/temporally structure these two moments of establishing individuality and establishing totality. Which comes first? Are they simultaneous moments? The perplexing thing here is that Watsuji gives two separate models *within the same volume* of *Ethics*. The first is the model of continuous negation:

The self-return of the Absolute is realized endlessly, and has nothing to do with a static and absolute destination. The place in which this self-returning is exhibited is the socio-ethical whole as finite. This is why the movement of the negation of absolute negativity is said to be the law of human beings; that is, it is ethics.¹⁵

Also, Watsuji writes, “The essential feature characteristic of human association is its constantly putting into effect the movement of the negation of negation. When this movement comes to a standstill in one way or another, the association itself collapses.”¹⁶ Thus, in this model, we see that this movement of negation is continuous and constant—it is irrelevant to state whether individuality or totality “comes first.” Watsuji writes: “We cannot first presuppose individuals, and then explain the establishment of social relationships among them. Nor can we presuppose society and from there explain the occurrence of individuals. Neither the one nor the other has ‘precedence’.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 26-27 (23).

¹⁵ Ibid., 127 (121).

¹⁶ Ibid., 125 (117-118).

¹⁷ Ibid., 107 (102). Translation emended.

However, Watsuji also presents a three-stage model that I think is *distinct* from the continuous negation model. Let us examine a fairly lengthy quote:

If it is argued that association, insofar as it is the connection of individuals, presupposes individuals who discard the community and that these individuals, insofar as they discard the community, already presuppose association, then this is mere circular reasoning. Individuals, no matter what association they may revolt against, turn out to 'revolt against', in the sense of negating the negativity as materialized in the association. And this negativity is, fundamentally speaking, absolute negativity; that is, emptiness. Therefore, it can be said that an individual revolts against 'emptiness' itself through the medium of her revolting against an association, whatever it may be. In coming to grips with the notion of the individual, we are already brought to 'emptiness' as its real feature. An individual becomes an individual by negating emptiness (i.e., authentic emptiness) as her own fundamental source. This is the self-negation of absolute negativity. In addition to that, an individual must be subordinate to society through emptying herself, regardless of how this emptying is performed. This means that emptiness is materialized in various associations to varying degrees. Therefore, an individual returns to 'emptiness' itself, through engaging in association of whatever sort. In our attempt to comprehend wholeness itself, its essential feature was also revealed to be emptiness. Absolute wholeness is absolute negativity. Seen in this light, human association, inclusive of coercion, is understood to be the movement of negation of negation in which absolute negativity returns to itself through its own self-negation.¹⁸

There are several key points in this quote alone. First, Watsuji is refusing the “circular reasoning” that we lauded in the previous section as Watsuji’s “most brilliant idea.” It is almost as if he is uncomfortable with his own idea that the foundation of human existence can be, like the continuous negation model suggests, two equiprimordial but *contradictory* elements.

Second, while emptiness was initially situated as what lies beneath *both* individuality and totality, here it seems like emptiness equated with totality, and the individual is almost opposed to it. This prioritization of totality is also seen in Watsuji’s terminology. He refers to the ground in which the double-negation of individuality and totality occurs as “absolute negativity,” which is also called “absolute totality” but never referred to as

¹⁸ Ibid., 123-124 (116-117).

“absolute individuality.” Also, he refers to this ground as “relational existence” (*ai-dagarateki sonzai*), but he only uses the word *aidagara* to refer to groups (as opposed to their members) but never to individuals.¹⁹

Third, this model makes the individual a mere detour on the way to genuine ethics. We see this in another quote: “There are three moments that are dynamically unified as the movement of negation: fundamental emptiness, then individual existence, and social existence as its negative development.”²⁰ What is the point of even individualizing then? This is something that, as Sueki points out, would end up with a scheme that subordinates the individual to totality, even if *ningen* might be defined in a “balanced” way.²¹

1.3 The Functioning of Individuality and Totality

How do totality and individuality actually function? As I have discussed above, various totalities shape every individual in every imaginable way. Groups form how we relate with our own bodies, how we perceive things, how we think, how we experience emotions. Watsuji even argues (likely against Heidegger) that totality shapes our very ability to see meaning in death.²² Finally, Watsuji points out that, in order to establish itself, the totality gives individuals their roles (*shikaku*) through which individuals participate in that whole, and the totality negates the individual by restricting the possibilities of the individual to

¹⁹ See *Ibid.*, 61 (57-58).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124 (117).

²¹ Sueki Fumihiko, *Tetsugaku no Genba* (Tokyo: Transview, 2012).

²² *WTZ10*, 237 (226).

those allowed by that particular role.²³ Thus, totalities determine all of our actions, which are done from the point of view of our particular roles within that totality.

Similarly, if we look at the way the whole is dependent on the individual, we see that individuality functions by making the totality possible through its existence, participation, and commitment. However, if the individual functioned in this manner alone (and Watsuji's chapter on "The Total Moment" makes it seem that way) then the individual would merely be a *material substrate* of human existence, passively taking on forms of life imposed by totalities. But Watsuji also argues that the establishment of individuality is essential. For instance, he argues with Marx, saying that the individual must not merely be a cog in the machine of historical materialism.²⁴ He criticizes Gabriel Tarde's view that society is created by a natural desire to imitate, for imitation alone cannot produce any sense of individuality.²⁵ He demands that members must individuate, lest they fall into the slumber of Heidegger's "the They" (*das Man*),²⁶ and distinguishes his idea of non-duality from inauthentic *Dasein*.²⁷ Clearly, Watsuji did not wish for individuality to disappear entirely into communality.

What then does it mean to establish the standpoint of individuality? I argue that this is a vague and contested concept in *Ethics*. While Watsuji mentions it, he only discusses it in passing (in comparison to his elaborate discussion of the establishing of totality). But, if one examines the examples scattered throughout the first volume, one finds

²³ Ibid., 95 (90).

²⁴ Ibid., 90 (85).

²⁵ Ibid., 109 (104).

²⁶ Ibid., 143 (135).

²⁷ Ibid., 237 (226).

that this rebellion against totality includes all acts that try to establish, whether intellectually or practically, the separateness of the individual from a particular whole. It includes seeing one's differences with the members of that whole, and sometimes even literally creating physical distance between oneself and others (as when one moves out of one's parental home). This negation has the key effect of making the individual self-conscious of his or her individual uniqueness—and thus, one's own impulses, desires, thoughts, will, and actions.

It is clear from the long quote a few pages ago that the realization of the standpoint of individuality is essential for a sense of individual self-awareness (*jikaku*). But what does this self-awareness actually accomplish? Why take the detour toward individuality, if only to negate the individual again to realize totality? Would this not paint a strange picture of an authentic *Dasein* that willingly goes along with a herd? For the most part, this volume lacks a theory of social change, leading Sakai Naoki to criticize Watsuji harshly: “In Watsuji's *Ethics*, individuality has to be viewed as a rebellion or as the guise of a rebellion that is always launched in anticipation of a prearranged resolution: it is a moment of deviation, but it always assumes a return to normalcy.”²⁸ This is also something that is criticized by Koyasu Nobukuni, who sees Watsuji's dialectic as something that lacks any forward movement.²⁹

If one hunts for possibilities of social change, one might find two hints: Watsuji writes, “A person who has turned his back on his own foundation in revolting against one community or another may then try to return to his own foundation by negating this revolt

²⁸ Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 88.

²⁹ See Nishitani, *Bunka to kôkyôsei*, 57.

once more. This return may also be achieved by recognizing another community.”³⁰ An individual can leave a community for another one. And perhaps in a non-violent and quite passive way, this might slowly affect social change by slowly eroding the membership of a group that is problematic.

Another possibility is that an individual can create a new group altogether. For instance, Watsuji takes up the examples of Siddhartha Gautama and Jesus of Nazareth and points out that they took an “individualist” standpoint in renouncing their respective societies in order to go directly to the Absolute.

When the Absolute was revealed to them, were they satisfied simply with submerging themselves in it? Not at all. Instead, they returned into the midst of the socio-ethical organization, expounded a ‘new social ethics’ or established a society of priests as an ideal yet typical socio-ethical organization.³¹

However, the presence of these hints in *Ethics* does not make them a dominant part of the discourse. On the contrary, the possibilities for social change remain marginal.

Because of this marginality of the idea of social change and the vestigial nature of individuality, Watsuji’s eventual description of the very notions of good and evil show a tilt toward totality. While he does point out that individualization is necessary for the expression of emptiness as the principle of ethics, he points out:

If goodness consists in truthfulness occurring, then any advance whatsoever of the movement of negation in *ningen sonzai* is goodness. Consequently, the individualizing movement in and through the negation of something whole is also goodness. But, from this, the conclusion cannot be directly drawn that revolting against the whole is goodness, because individualization is not yet by itself a revolting against.³²

³⁰ *WTZ10*, 141 (134). Note that the original is rather ambiguous on if this is an entirely different collective.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 129 (122).

³² *Ibid.*, 299 (283-284).

He points out that individualizing *on its own* is not “good.” Rather, good is only when individualization “already anticipat[es] the unity in the future in and through this present opposition.”³³ However, he does not speak of the lack of goodness in a “mere” return to community, or the need to anticipate future opposition when returning to unity.

Even Watsuji’s view of conscience mirrors this:

The standpoint of an acting *I* consists of the disruption of self and other and thus is established in the direction of negating authenticity. Precisely because that authenticity is so negated, it turns out to be a voice calling forth an acting *I*. What is more, just because it is a voice coming from the authentic totality, it has the authority to accuse, overwhelm and awe the self, even though it is heard from the bottom of the self.³⁴

In a direct critique of Heidegger’s view of conscience that sees guilt as the call of authentic (non-relational) *Dasein* to itself as mired in the They, Watsuji argues that conscience is the call of the “*con*,” the with, the community. As such, even the very negation of totality that an individual enacts is itself seen as being called forth by the community. This solidifies the view that totality is the focus of ethics, and not a perfect balance of individuality and totality.

In summary, Watsuji seeks to destabilize any substantial grounding in individuality or totality, giving human existence a contradictory ground in emptiness. However, negation can be seen as an endless cycle between individual and totality or a three-stage process that seems to take totality as primary. An examination of the functioning of individuality and totality shows that while totality dictates the form of society, individuals are merely obedient but self-aware members. The notion of social change is marginal. As

³³ Ibid., 299 (284).

³⁴ Ibid., 326 (308).

such, despite the claim to the equiprimordiality of individuality and totality and the effort to destabilize any substantialization of either, the first volume of *Ethics* tends to prioritize totality and fails to sufficiently acknowledge the ability of individuals to shape existing communities.

2 The Wartime Story

In the wartime volume, Watsuji's *Ethics* shifts toward studying various *sittliche* organizations (*jinrinteki soshiki*): the family, the local community, economics, the cultural community, and the state. "Each stage has its own structure of solidarity, and in this way each of these structures exhibits a particular form of the law inherent in the *sonzai* of *ningen*."³⁵

By examining the structure of each level of organization and the particular virtues human truthfulness manifests in each level, Watsuji hopes to concretize his discussion of the dual-structure of human existence and their negative unfolding. I wish to focus on five main themes in this volume: First, I will discuss the dialectics of finite totalities and the conceptual diminution of individuality. Then, I will proceed to a spiral model of dialectics, a third model in addition to the previous two in *Ethics I*. Third, I will discuss cultural change and a new role for individuality. Fourth, I will tackle Watsuji's theory of the state and its relation to individuals and lower-level communities. Finally, I will discuss the *revisions* Watsuji made between the 1942 edition and the 1946 edition of *Ethics II*, particularly surrounding contested ideas like democracy, international relations, and war.

2.1 Focusing on Finite Totalities

³⁵ Ibid., 28 (24).

Ethics II contained several developments that greatly weakened the critical powers of individuality. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Watsuji fundamentally disagreed with the existence of “a thing that is essentially private,” and did not recognize the singularity of experiences like death. We saw this refusal of singularity repeatedly reinforced in the total fusion of husband and wife, the convenient harmonization of differences (like sexual difference) in a *yin-yang* schema of predetermined complementary roles, and a sense of language as a mere expression of a preexisting mutual understanding. Thus, this “non-singular” view of the individual further exacerbated the tendency in *Ethics I* to see the individual as a mere functionary of totalities.

It has been pointed out that Watsuji’s *Ethics II* is structurally similar to Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. And many of his “totalitarian” tendencies (like his view of sexual difference and the subordination of the individual to the community) are Hegelian. However, sometimes Watsuji is *even more conservative* than Hegel, for instance, in his economic theory. In Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, civil society plays the important role of being the level in which individuality is fostered in opposition to the communality of the family so that the two opposing moments can be sublated and unified in the state.³⁶ But Watsuji, who shows much Hegelian influence in this volume,³⁷ refuses the theory of civil society and argues for a relational economics of mutual service: “*Economic organization is an inter-human ethical organization (jinrin soshiki) mediated by goods. And what the economic activity within this organization aims for is not the satiation*”

³⁶ This was inspired by Lukas Kaelin, *Strong Family, Weak State: Hegel’s Political Philosophy and the Filipino Family* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2012).

³⁷ For more on Hegel’s influence on Watsuji, see Alasdair Swale, “The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsurô: A Reappraisal of Western and Eastern Influences,” In B. Carr (Ed.), *Morals and Society in Asian Philosophy*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996.

of desires in itself, but rather inter-human ethical unity through the satiation of desires.”³⁸

Even utility is for totality, not individuals. Thus, every level of human organization transforms into a space for the negation of individuality to realize the whole—where then will *ningen* cultivate the negation of totality to realize individuality?

On the other hand, as we have seen in Chapter I, for the most part of *Ethics II*, Watsuji does not speak of “absolute totality.” This is another key difference between Watsuji and Hegel. Even when Watsuji does mention absolute totality, he repeatedly mentions that it only exists as expressed in finite totalities that are themselves exclusive and limited: There is no universal language, no universal religion, no universal art form, no universal science (even!), and most importantly, *no universal community of humankind*. I call this a “subtle double-negation,” where both absolute individuality and absolute totality are negated.

There are two instances where we see this negation of universality very clearly. At the end of his discussion on cultural community, he argues that the very qualification of personhood is tied not to the individual or to any individual traits (reason or language), but to one’s membership in a community:

Previously, we referred to *people who can become friends* within a culture as persons (*jinkaku*). This word, *jinkaku*, is different from *persona*, which means a mask (*men*) or role, but, rather means, “the qualification of a person as a person,” or “the quality of a person.” As such, the possibility of someone becoming a friend is the very qualification of [a person] as a person. In other words, [this qualification is] if *one is able to enter culturally shared existence*. There are many examples of people in ancient times who only considered as people “those who possess language” (*kotoba*), which is none other than stipulating that a person is a member of a language community. But perhaps a more thorough stipulation would be [that a person is] “one who realizes

³⁸ WTZ10, 489. 経済的組織は財を媒介とする人倫組織である。そうしてこの組織における経済的活動が目ざすところは、欲望の充足そのものでなくして、欲望充足を通じて人倫的合一である。

one's lived totality (*ikeru zentaisei*) in some form, and practices one's belonging to and submission to that."³⁹

Here, he criticizes the idea of any notion of personhood directly arising from one's individuality (or in connection with an infinite universal like reason). Thus, human relations seem to become restricted within the borders of cultural community—and only within which can we even be persons.

Not even his idea of absolute totality is immune to this finitude:

As I have previously mentioned, the ultimate foundation of human existence is absolute totality, in other words, absolute negativity. But when one gives that absoluteness any sort of concrete name, at that instant, we tilt toward some form of established religion. . . . Even if we try to avoid this determination by taking the stance of emptiness that overcomes the relativity of being and nothingness, a strong Buddhist hue is seen right there.⁴⁰

Thus, he argues that any attempt to address the absolute—in truth, beauty, or in religious feeling—necessarily attains concrete awareness in a *finite* expression within a tradition that is, of course, part of a finite totality. (Watsuji was very close here to admitting that even his own systematic ethics, as an attempt to express a universal moral principle, is merely a finite expression and thus historico-culturally limited.)

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 588. 我々は前に文化の場面において友人たり得る人を人格と呼んだが、この人格という言葉は、面とか役割とかを意味する *persona* とは異なり、「人の人としての資格」あるいは「人の品格」を意味するであるから、右の規定において我々は友人たり得ることを人としての資格と認めたことになる。それは言い換えれば文化的な共同存在に入り得ることである。古来人の人たるゆえんを「言葉を持つこと」に認めた例は少なくないが、これは人を言語共同体の一員として規定することにほかならない。が、一層徹底的な規定は「おのれの生ける全体性を何らかの形において自覚し、それへのおのれの帰属あるいは服従を実践すること」として言い現せるであろう。

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 560-561. 人間存在の究極の根源が絶対的全体性すなわち絶対的否定性であることはすでに説いたところであるが、その絶対性に何らか具体的な名を与えるならば、その時我々は直ちに既成宗教のいずれかに傾かねばならぬであろう。…この限定を避けるために有無相対を超えるところの空の立場を取っても、そこには顕著に仏教の色彩が現われて来る。

But that is not to balance the strength of individuality and totality by negating them both. As one might sense, the effect is rather the opposite: Most theories of individuality (like various forms of liberalism) ground the critical power of the individual in the universal—universal rights, universal reason, the universal kingdom of god. In the name of these universals, an individual can resist the status quo of finite totalities. Thus, the negation of both absolute individuality and universality actually completes the dominance of finite totality.

Thus, the overall picture *Ethics II* gives is of an individual submerged in finite totalities. Through the dialectic of private and public existence, that which is private is negated in order to give rise to a higher level of publicness. This public existence is still private relative to larger groups, and thus must be negated further until one arrives at the most public human organization—the state.

2.2 Dialectics as a Spiral Ascent

The focus here seems to be on the negation of the individual. What happened then to the *mutual* negation of individuality and totality, the cycle that he spoke of in *Ethics I*? He mentions it but once, in his discussion of the husband-wife relationship:

The realization of this communal existence is not something that is carried out but once at a particular time. As one way of returning to the authenticity of *ningen*, it must be carried out ceaselessly and dynamically. The couple must always confront each other (*tairitsu shite*) anew and come together anew, separate and reunite.⁴¹

However, this lone exhortation to ceaseless confrontation is not supported by other elements of the discussion. For instance, each stage of organization has certain virtues by

⁴¹ WTZ10, 371. かかる共同存在の実現はある時一度行われるというごときものではない。それは人間の本来性への帰来の一つの仕方として、やむことなく動的に行われねばならぬ。二人は絶えず新しく対立して合一し、分離して結合する。

which the individual expresses its truthfulness (*makoto*). In the case of the couple, these virtues are marital harmony, fidelity, and chastity. But while these virtues clearly express negating the individual to commit to totality, is any sense of establishing individuality present? It is a similar story for virtues in other stages of his discussion. For instance, in local community, the virtues of taking up one's role (*ichinin mae ni naru*), *fraternité*, and consideration (*kokorozukai*) negate individuality, but there is no stress on creativity, leadership, criticality, or innovation.⁴²

However, the virtue of *kokorozukai* does give us an indication of the preservation of private groups. As I have mentioned in Chapter I, consideration is a virtue wherein one puts one's private concerns on hold in order to focus on public concerns, and, at the same time, taking care not to intrude on the private concerns of others.⁴³ As such, we see that, while private existence is *sublated* in order to move to a higher level of publicness, it is not eliminated but rather it is conserved in the higher level of publicness. And from the point of view of the public, it is necessary to preserve the integrity of these private moments. Thus, the local community's communal interests necessitate that families overcome their own "egotism" and serve the community. But the community in turn must do what it can to protect the functions of the family—for instance, through the social regulation of taboos like marital infidelity. This *conservation* is perhaps the closest we get in *Ethics II* to a "negation of the totality in order to realize individuality." But given the view

⁴² This is different from care ethics in the sense that, while fostering intersubjective connections and commitments is a key part of care ethics, the importance of criticizing unjust and exploitative caring relations is always considered alongside that. See Fiona Robinson, *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 23-27.

⁴³ WTZ10, 462-468.

of virtue I have mentioned, there is no *active* critical role that these conserved private existences play.

Thus, in this wartime volume, we can see another model of the dialectics of emptiness, distinct from the continuous negation model, and perhaps closer to but still distinct from the three-stage model: the spiral ascent model. In this model, individuality and totality are replaced by finite totalities that are private relative to more public finite totalities. The private is negated in order to realize a higher level of publicness, which in turn conserves the private totalities within it. This public is then negated as a private moment relative to larger totalities. Thus, we gradually ascend from the couple, to the family, to the town, to the cultural community, and finally to the state.

2.3 The Mechanism of Cultural Change

In contrast to this absorption of the individual into a spiraling ascent of finite totalities toward the state, *Ethics II* also provides the first clear model for communal change. This is something we have seen briefly in Chapter II, so allow me to develop it fully here. While *Ethics I* only hinted at social change by leaving groups or by forming new ones, *Ethics II* for the first time shows how an individual can change an *existing* group. Of course, these are not “social change” proper, because they do not involve society as a whole. Rather, they have to do with cultural groups—particularly changes and advances in art, science (or scholarship), and religion—which are all considered to be subordinate to the state. But as I will demonstrate in the next section, these developments were crucial for *Ethics III*.

The core of the idea of cultural change has to do with the unity Watsuji sees between cultural *products* and cultural *production*:

As a *subjective dynamic tension*, culture is the *communality* (*kyôdôsei*) that precedes the opposition between subjects and simultaneously is subjective *activity*. And from there, it simultaneously makes subjects oppose each other and shows itself objectively as the medium (*baikaisha*) of the unity of subjects. Therefore, culture means, on one hand, cultural production (*bunka katsudô*) and also, on the other hand, means cultural products or assets.⁴⁴

As such, we see clearly the dual-structure of individuality and totality placed in *creative tension* with each other, with totality providing a context of cultural products within which and in tension with which individuality as *subjects in opposition* can carry out cultural activity in the form of production. We see this clearly in the four types of culture: language, art, science, and religion.

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, Watsuji sees language as an expression of pre-existing mutual understanding. And this idea definitely limits any sense of singularity in Watsuji. However, despite this view of language, Watsuji sees language as something that is also dynamically created. From the foundation of preexisting words, new words or new usages for old words are formed, making it possible to convey new things. And for Watsuji, it is only through this constant re-creation of language that language maintains its vitality.⁴⁵ But not only that:

In expressing this mutual intelligibility, [and] while bearing the preexisting linkages between subjects, linguistic activity constantly creates the linkages between subjects anew. If one pays attention to this working, one can say that linguistic activity is *the working that creates relationality* (*aidagara*). . . . [It is] a double creative activity that, in *making language* as a meaningful form, *creates relationality* [as well].⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 520. 文化は主体的動的なる張りとして、主体の対立に先立つ共同性でありつつ同時に主体的な活動なのであり、そうしてそこから主体を相対立せしめると同時にその合一の媒介者として客体的に己れを現してくるものである。従って文化は一面において文化活動を意味するとともに、他面において文化生産・文化財を意味する。

⁴⁵ Ibid., 531-532.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 531. 言語活動はかく相互了解性を表現することにおいて、主体の間の既存の連関を背負いつつ常に新しく主体の間の連関を作り出す。この働きに著目すれば、言語活動は間

Thus, language shows the possibility of the individual recreating the very parameters of togetherness through the renegotiation of the meaning of words. This ability to create and recreate community through language connects to the other three forms of culture.

In art, the artist is seen as mediating between shared sensibilities and formless form—the emptiness of absolute totality that is behind each community.⁴⁷ As such, the artist is able to contribute something novel and timeless while connecting to the sensibilities of a particular culture. Similarly, his view of *scientia* (which is *his* profession) is quite telling:

As one enters this communality, one realizes certain problems (*gimonten*) that remain unclear, and there begins the original cognitive activity of pursuing a problem [to be solved]. This is the second stage. This activity is very individualistic, but, at the same time, can only occur as communal cognitive activity.⁴⁸

As such, we see the scholar with a clear sense of *contributory* individuality. The scholar negates the pre-existing ways of looking at a particular problem in order to attain his or her own insight into it, but contributes to his/her field in response to shared concerns.⁴⁹ This pattern repeats itself in religion, where the individual's direct religious experience of the absolute is both shaped by shared religious sentiments and shared through the mediation of these common approaches to religion. (We will discuss this dynamics further, especially regarding religion, in Chapter VI.)

柄を作る働きであるといえるであろう。…意味あるかたちとしての言語を作ることにおいて
柄を作るところの、二重の創作活動である。

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 544.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 551. この共同性に入るとともにまだ明らかにされない疑問点のあり場所がわかり、そこに問題追求としての本来的な認識活動が始まる。これが第二段である。この活動はきわめて個性的であるが、しかも共同的な認識活動としてのみ行われ得る。

⁴⁹ This argument is likely in support of Nishida Kitarô's "*Gakumonteki hôhô*," which was written between 1937-1940. In this essay, Nishida argues for scholarly freedom from national impositions. See Matteo Cestari, "The Individual and Individualism in Nishida and Tanabe," in *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, ed. Christopher S. Goto-Jones (London: Routledge, 2008), 56.

What we see here is a very clear model for cultural change. For Watsuji, art, science, and religion all have to do with the absolute in one form or another. This relationship with the absolute is expressed both as cultural products—existing objects that express beauty, knowledge, or religious truth—and as cultural *production*. Any member of a cultural community is exposed to cultural products that shape the way the individual sees the absolute. But cultural production, which is necessary for the vitality of culture, requires that the individual return directly before the absolute. While this return is shaped by existing cultural products, it is clearly an individuating movement. Thus, the return to totality is a *creative* and *contributory* one—a cultural production. This active production results in new cultural products that form a continuity with, but go beyond, existing forms of culture.

This discussion of cultural change opposes the spiral model of the dialectics of emptiness by emphasizing the dynamic, critical, and contributory role of the individual and thus, returning to something akin to the continuous negation model of *Ethics I*. This would give Watsuji's view of the individual a strong critical character that resists the givenness of culture suggested by many communitarian theorists. Even further, it finally provides a rationale for how individualization might move an existing community forward and make it progress—thus, potentially responding to the critiques of Sakai and Koyasu on the stagnation of Watsuji's dialectics.

2.4 The Citizen and the State

Despite the notion of criticality suggested in Watsuji's view of culture in this volume, it is unfortunately the exception rather than the rule. This is particularly clear in contrast

with what he discusses next—the state. No part of Watsuji’s *Ethics* is as clearly communitarian (some might argue *totalitarian*) as his theory of citizen-state relations. Let us examine more closely the aspects that directly relate with the question of individuality and totality.

Watsuji begins with a remarkable description of the position of the state in the dialectic of private and public existence:

In *ningen sonzai*, communality is always accompanied by exclusivity (*heisasei*). But, despite that, a community that thoroughly overcomes (*chôkoku suru*) the “I” and is, through and through, “public” (*ôyake*) has been a concern ever since. This is the *state* as “public.” “*Ôyake*” was [written as] “*大家*” [lit. great house] in our ancient language. The first stage of the realization of communality is the “house,” and the last stage here is called the “great house.” . . . While it is called public, it is clear that [the state] is exclusive. Furthermore, people unconditionally refer to it as public, and do not consider its private character.⁵⁰

Watsuji affirms this reading of the state as a “great house” and as a totality that is totally public, and raises this as an ideal (against “deprived forms” wherein the state becomes egoistic and brandishes its private character). This ideal of the state is thus quite different from the liberal view of the state and requires a much more “intimate” connection between this big family and individual citizens, and thus, demands a more thorough sense of selflessness from citizens.

As we saw in Chapter I, Watsuji then defines the state as a *comprehensive* organization that unifies all organizations beneath it—family, churches, schools, economy—giving them order, protecting them, and allowing them to fulfill their functions. That is

⁵⁰ WTZ10, 594. 人間存在にあっては共同性は常に閉鎖性を伴うのであるが、しかしそれにもかかわらず、「私」をことごとく超克して徹頭徹尾「公」であるところの共同体が古くより問題とされて来た。それが「公」そのものとしての国家である。「おおやけ」はわが国の古語にあっては「大家」であるといわれる。共同性実現の第一の段階は「家」であったが、その最後の段階がここに「大家」と呼ばれるのである。…公共的と言いながらもそれが閉鎖的であることは明らかである。しかも人はそれを無条件に公共的なるものと呼び、その私的性格を見ないのである。

not to say that the state controls every facet of the life of a citizen. Rather, the state always exhorts the individual to selflessness *through sub-state totalities*, and only uses the force of law in order to protect the minimum outlines of each finite totality (by, for instance, enforcing monogamy).⁵¹ In this way, the state encourages citizens to be good members of their various totalities; thus, “The individual members of the state, upon the ground of this totality, mature (*enjô*) in their personal individuality, and, at the same time, by returning to this totality, arrive at their original dignity (or authentic face).”⁵²

This view of the relation of the citizen and the state stresses the embeddedness of individuals in various totalities and their flourishing within them, and thus, argues for a state that participates in and through even private totalities. This is clearly opposed to the liberal view of the state, which Watsuji refers to as a “*Gesellschaft*” state. For Watsuji, such a state is only concerned with individuals and their own (egotistic) interests. This sort of model, which he sees in social contract theorists like Hobbes, would make it impossible for a state to “give order” to other totalities. Thus, the state would merely be one totality amongst other totalities (like the church or economic groups). Not only that, it would be detrimental to the very structure of finite totalities, because, while families and churches and schools are busy trying to engender the selflessness of their members, the state secures the free and self-interested competition of individuals.

While many contemporary readers may have misgivings about Watsuji’s communitarian (or totalitarian) view of the state, I think his criticism of liberalism is worth considering. Scott Yenor argues in his *Family Politics: The Idea of Marriage in Modern*

⁵¹ Ibid., 600.

⁵² Ibid., 605. 国家の個々の成員は、この全体性の地盤において人格的個別性を円成するとともに、この全体性へ帰入することによって、己が本来の面目に到達する。

Political Thought (2011) that liberal *politics* in the public sphere inevitably affects the way we think about even private relationships in the intimate sphere. Thus, liberal politics (as seen in John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Simone de Beauvoir) tended to erode the notion of deep family ties in favor of a view of marriage founded on “consent, equality, and freedom,” where the positive value of mutual dependence and commitment tends to fall into neglect. I think Watsuji’s idea here foreshadows the dangers of liberalism and the illusory nature of the supposed split between the private and the public.

Obviously, this view of the state and citizens has an effect on the notion of rights. As we have seen, the notion of rights (to freedom of choice, possession, and so on) moves from a purely public discourse to even the private sphere (as in consent in marriage, disputes regarding possession in divorce, and so forth). Watsuji points out how the discourse of rights tends to be accompanied by a view of the individual as an “autonomous, individual will” that is the subject of these rights and duties, which is seen in a manner completely abstracted from the individual’s membership in families, cultural groups, and so forth. Watsuji criticizes this view, and sees the state as concerned, not with abstract individuals, but with concrete persons situated within various totalities. Thus,

In consideration for this point, the state secures the “freedom” for each individual to realize the path of *Sittlichkeit* (*jinrin no michi*). The freedom of residence, the freedom to communicate, the freedom of religious belief, the freedom of speech, etc., are all as such. However, the duties as a member of the state are not exhausted by these [freedoms.] Just as the state is, as the systematic self-awareness (*jikaku*) of the various *sittliche* organizations, a higher *sittliche* organization, the members of the state too, as the systematic self-awareness of those various *sittliche organizations*, ought to have a higher membership. In this, [they are] called to freely abandon the abovementioned freedoms and through extreme self-abandonment (*kyoshi*), immerse themselves in the ultimate human totality.⁵³

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 607. 国家はこの点を顧慮して個々の成員に人倫の道を実現するための「自由」を保証する。居住の自由、通信の自由、信教の自由、言論の自由などと呼ばれているものがそれである。しかし国家の成員としての任務はそれだけに尽きるのではない。国家がそれぞれの

While Watsuji recognizes the need for rights, these are not rights that promote a liberal sense of autonomous self, but rather, rights that enable the individual to freely participate in totalities. And within the “human organization of all human organizations,” these rights may be sacrificed. Watsuji cites Socrates’ willingness to accept his punishment as proof of the demand for *absolute obedience* to the state—to the law and the constitution—particularly in extraordinary situations like war.⁵⁴

This view of rights gives Watsuji a very unorthodox view of justice that does not presume an autonomous self with autonomous needs:

We can call giving all citizens their place *justice (seigi)*. This means working toward *every person* being able to realize communal existence through the mediation of his or her private existence, and that [every person] may be a member of the state as the unity of the realization of their paths.⁵⁵

Thus, we see that in Watsuji’s definition of the state, its relationship to other communities, and the resulting views on rights and justice, he brings back the emphasis to the individual’s situatedness (and perhaps subservience) to finite totalities in obedience to a strong, comprehensive state.

2.5 Between 1942 and 1946: A State at War

人倫的組織の体系的自覚として高次の人倫的組織であるように、国家の成員もまたそれぞれの成員性の体系的自覚として高次の成員性を持たなくてはならぬ。ここでは右の如き一切の自由をさえも自ら放擲して究極な人間の全体性に没入するところの究極的な去私が要求せられるのである。

⁵⁴ Ibid., 620.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 623-624. 万民に右のごとき所を得しめることを我々は正義と呼ぶことができるであろう。それはいかなる人もがそれぞれ私的存在を媒介として共同存在を実現し得るように、そうしてそれらの道の実現の統一として国家の成員たり得るように、仕向けることである。

Watsuji's view of the citizen and the state is closely tied to his view of the ethnic nation (*minzoku*), imperialism, democracy, and war. But, as one can recall, Watsuji was writing and publishing in World War II, when these very issues were greatly contested (and a false step could be a matter of life and death). As such, it is necessary to examine how his treatment shifts from the wartime 1942 version of *Ethics II* to its revised form in the immediate post-war period (1946).

Let us begin with the 1942 version. If one examines the above ideal of the citizen-state relation, one can say that such a model requires a very smooth, natural relationship between the individual, the various communities, and the “great house” of the state. Watsuji justifies this in his discussion of the necessary unity of nation and state. According to him, originally, the state arises from the *living totality* of the nation. Thus, the ruler (and the apparatus of governance) here is seen as divine, a conduit between the people and their gods. However, this all changes when the nation is conquered. A conqueror imposes a sovereignty that is not tied to the living totality of the conquered but is external to it. According to Watsuji, such a ruler has might (*kenryoku*)—not authority (*ken'i*). This leads to the *secularization* of the state, where the totality and its sacredness become separate, and where nation and state are no longer one. After this stage of external rule, perhaps the nation can revolt and take back power. But, for Watsuji, this “democratic stage” comes too late, for by this point the original living totality is lost:

However, this is different from the compelling experience of profoundly realizing the living totality of the nation (*minzoku*) as sacred. [It is just] an artificially “contrived” [state], and so [it tends to resort to] the most accessible notion of totality as a *quantitative total* (*sûryôteki sôkei*). Thus, the general will is decided via ballots. However, these ballots merely represent no more than the will of the individual self (*watashi*), and so the selves of the majority replace the self of the [conquering] sovereign as the bearer of authority. Neither expresses *authentic* sovereignty. Sovereignty ought to be

(*hazu*) completely “public,” and does not admit of self/ego even if it is that of the majority.⁵⁶

I think Watsuji’s criticism of democracy as the “selfish rule of the masses” rings true, and it resembles other critiques of the “perversions” of democracy, from the classics of Plato and Alexis de Tocqueville to contemporary thinkers like Jürgen Habermas and Ian Shapiro. However, it begs the question of whether or not his “original state” of the perfect fusion of nation and state ever applied to Japan, given the presence of foreigners and outcasts all throughout the history of Japan. Perhaps the idea of a perfect unity of all under the living totality of a divine nation-state is a fundamentally mythic, imagined view of the nation.

This view of the original integrity of the ethnic nation connects with Watsuji’s view of international relations. Watsuji is strongly critical of imperialism and the colonization of nations—he sees these as acts of aggression that destroy the cultural richness of humankind. He singles out Great Britain as a perpetrator of these aforementioned acts. Great Britain, in promoting its own national interests via colonial aggression, contradicts the whole utilitarian idea of the “greatest happiness for the greatest number” (unless of course, you are only counting the happiness of the British). Watsuji expands this criticism to other “conglomerate states” like the United States and Australia, and lambasts the League of Nations as a cover for the national egoisms of these states.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *WTZ11*, 422. しかしこれは、民族の生ける全体性を聖なるものとして感得した切実な体験とは異なり、人為的に「考え出される」のであるから、最も考えられやすい全体として数量的な総計になってしまう。従って全体の意志は投票できめられる。しかるにその投票は単なる私の意志をも示し得るのであるから、ここでは君主の私の代わりに多数の私の総計が権力を持つことになる。いずれも本来の主権性を示すものでない。主権性は徹頭徹尾「公」であって、いかに多数者のそれであろうとも私の混入を許さないはずである。

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 424-427.

Because there are aggressors like these, war becomes a legitimate *moral* concern:

The defense of the state is not just a protection of the happiness of individuals from the threat of a foreign invader but a defense of the state itself. Therefore it is a grasping of *sittliche* organizations, a protection of the way of humanity (*jinrin no michi*). With this in mind, defense of the state is not a means but is, of itself, something with socio-ethical value.⁵⁸

An inability to carry out this defense is a sign of moral weakness (*jinrinteki na yowasa*).

Thus, military training and technology have ethical value. Watsuji directly justifies the need for Japan to militarize and he praises the war effort of Japan. (But interestingly, he criticizes the capitalistic arms industry as immoral.)⁵⁹

Because of this moral demand, Watsuji refuses the idealism of pacifism as something impossible given the political realities of his time—and he points out how pacifism can be a sign of cowardice, particularly in the case of *Pax Americana*.⁶⁰ However, I think there is something fundamentally different between Watsuji's stance and that of the participants of the *Chûôkôron* discussions (Nishitani Keiji, Kôyama Iwao, Kôsaka Masaaki and Suzuki Shigetaka), because the latter did not merely see war as an unfortunate necessity but as a positive force and an eternal truth in history—one that overcame the selfishness of citizens, reintegrated citizens into the national whole, and thus improved the “moral health of the peoples/nations.”⁶¹ Watsuji consistently focused on war as a form of defense, and always treated war as an unfortunate result of the immoral imposition of one

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 428. 国家の防衛も、個人の幸福を外敵の脅威から守るというのではなく、国家自身の防衛であり、従って人倫的組織の把持、人倫の道の防護なのである。この点から見れば、国防は手段ではなくしてそれ自身に人倫的意義を有するものである。

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 428-429.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁶¹ Christian Uhl, “What was the ‘Japanese Philosophy of History’? An Inquiry into the Dynamics of the ‘World-Historical Standpoint’ of the Kyoto School,” in *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, ed. Christopher Goto-Jones (Oxon, Routledge: 2008), 117-119.

nation's particularity upon others. Thus, even though he was supportive of national defense, he was a firm critic of wars of aggression:

The standpoint that rejects individualism and asserts the authority of the state is recognizing the predominance of the whole over the individual. Then they should also reject individualism (*kojinshugi*) within the standpoint of the state. That is to say, the state should not take interests as its principle and war with other states, but should discipline itself according to the standpoint of the totality that transcends the state. But statist (*kokkashugisha*) refuse to recognize trans-national law and absolutize the interests of their own nations.⁶²

It is interesting that, here, in the midst of war and talking about the most dangerous of topics, Watsuji is actually giving his strongest critique of imperialism and militarism. (Although he quickly points out that this criticism applies to *Gesellschaft* states and not to Japan. But I wonder if he really meant this critique as merely one way, and if his readers had not quickly made out this implicit critique.)

Needless to say, very little of these ideas survived the massive revisions of the 1946 edition. Watsuji omitted all of his direct criticisms of the Allied powers: the subjugation of the blacks by the Americans, the imperialism of Great Britain, and the abuses of the League of Nations. He also removed his criticism of democracy, and instead positively appraises democracy as a “functional totality” that effectively replaces the original substance of the “living totality,” and realizes the sacredness of totality through reason (*risei*) and self-awareness.⁶³ He also softens his critique of the League of Nations and replaces it with a glowing appraisal of the possibilities of the United Nations.⁶⁴ Also,

⁶² WTZ11, 430-431. 個人主義を排して国家の全体性の権威を主張する立場は、個に対する全の優位を承認しているといえる。しからば彼は国家の立場における個人主義をも排しなくてはならないのである。すなわち国家は己が利害を原理として他の国家と争うべきでなく、国家を超えた全体性の立場から己れを規律しなくてはならない。しかるに国家主義者は超国家的な法を認めずしておのが国家の利害を絶対視する。

⁶³ WTZ10, 612-613.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 614-616.

since his critique of imperialism and colonial activities is much weaker in the post-war revision, his discussion of “just war theory” seems out of place. He is also much more insistent about the exclusively defensive character of war, and he removes his supports for Japan’s participation in World War II.

As Nishitani and other commentators have mentioned, these revisions generally did not alter Watsuji’s theories, with the exception of his view of international organizations. (We will discuss this more in Chapter IV.) But they do give an indication of the circumstances that Watsuji was writing in and the difficulties that he faced.

Overall, from the view of the family to the view of the state, to Watsuji’s view of the virtues in communal life (marital harmony, fraternity, liberty, justice, etc.), the second volume presents an individual person largely submerged within finite totalities. Examining the functioning of individuality, it is very difficult to see any notion of social change coming from the individual nor any “continuous negation” between the individual and the whole. The privacy of groups functions merely to sustain its own integrity. However, publicness and totality function to sublimate, protect, and, in the case of the state, give order to various forms of private existence. Therefore, what we have is a model of spiral ascent, where Watsuji focuses on the progression of finite and exclusive totalities from the private toward the most public organization that is the state. There is a brief divergence from this general direction that we find in Watsuji’s theory of cultural change. While this is an important divergence, it is hardly consistent with the rest of this volume.

3 Post-War Reflections

While the first volume had a weak sense of an individual influencing totalities by changing membership or creating new totalities, and the second volume restricted change to cultural communities, the post-war volume finally spelled out the individual's role in changing society as a whole.

Not that the post-war volume is focused on this. Rather, it focuses on historicity as a concretization of temporality and mediance (*fûdosei*) as a concretization of spatiality, recasting the spatio-temporal and dual-negative structures on the level of individual states. So, as most of this volume focuses on inter-national relations, let me briefly address three themes pertinent to our understanding of individuality and totality: First, reinterpreting the movement of double-negation; second, the individual and historical progress; and third, national morality.

3.1 Reinterpreting the Movement of Double-Negation

Watsuji understands history as something that unfolds as a result of the interaction and resulting self-recognition of different nations. In examining the overall history of humankind from the primitive ages up to the present, he offers a distinct reinterpretation of the movement of double-negation on the level of individual nations.

For Watsuji, primitive human beings are very homogenous, with no real distinction between peoples. This is akin to the stage of unnegated totality. But as people are dispersed throughout varying climates and thus forge unique histories, the unity of climatic and historical particularity gives rise to what he calls “national *sonzai*.”⁶⁵ This gives each nation a sense of national “individuality,” and allows them to become self-conscious

⁶⁵ *WTZ11*, 191-192.

of their difference through their interaction with others. But the challenge then arises to unify these distinct states into *one humankind*, while preserving and respecting their national particularity:

The *ideal* finally arose in history that we should form humankind into *one community* with no divisions of nation or state, and, in so doing, realize the law of *ningen sonzai* at the level of humankind (*jinruiteki ni*). This is the *ideal of the unity of humankind*. In this ideal, humankind can be said to have become self-conscious of its essence, that is, that the same law of *ningen sonzai* makes humankind into what it is.⁶⁶

His vision of this is not a homogenized global state, but rather an international community founded on global economics of mutual contribution through national (especially climatic) differences, and on a “global culture” that is overlaid upon national culture, allowing for a cosmopolitan level of interaction.⁶⁷ This international community presupposes the integrity, uniqueness, and ethical unity of the subordinate nation-states. Thus, cosmopolitanism is taken, not as a transnational relationship between individuals, but as an international relationship between totalities. (We will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter IV.)

From the point of view of the question of the relationship between the individual and the whole, this reinterpretation of double-negation is crucial because it gives us another possible meaning to the initial movement suggested in *Ethics* vol. 1. In the first volume, the double-negation could be understood as either an endless cycle of negation between individuality and totality or as a three-stage development from unnegated totality

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68. 人類が民族や国家の別なく一つの共同体を形成し、それによって人間存在の理法を人類的に実現すべきであるという理念が、歴史的に生み出されるに至った。これが人類の統一の理念である。この理念において人類はおのれの本質を、すなわち同じ人間存在の理法が人類を人類たらしめていることを、自覚したのであるとあってよいであろう。この自覚は人類の歴史の産物であるが、同時にまた人類の歴史の意義の自覚であるということもできる。

⁶⁷ Ibid., 403-407.

to individuality and back to totality. In *Ethics II*, we saw a third model of spiral ascent somewhat akin to the three-stage model. What the third volume shows, despite its primary focus on the relationship between totalities and a larger totality, is that the third stage (totality as realized by individuals) can be seen as an *ideal synthesis* of totality and individuality, a *unity-in-difference* where individuals serve each other as one totality, on the very basis of their differences. This synthesis is not given, but rather, it is something sought out through history, wherein the movement toward this unity-in-difference can often be hit and miss—sacrificing individuality for totality (like in the age of empires) or sacrificing totality to recover individuality (like in the collapse of empires)—as we slowly work to realizing the form that unity-in-difference might take. This recasts the endless negation model as one having a sense of forward movement, without falling into the simple teleology of the three-stage model or the unidirectionality of the spiral ascent model.

3.2 The Individual and Historical Progress

Despite this overwhelming focus on nations and their histories, it is in this volume that the determinative capacity of the individual is at its most vivid. For Watsuji, all progress in history goes by way of freedom (in agreement with Kant). But what does this freedom entail? He writes:

One who takes the standpoint of individual liberation (*kaihô*) should be able to selflessly serve, and one who takes the standpoint of devoted service should be able to resolutely negate totality. Otherwise, freedom falls into simple bestial *self-indulgence* or *servility*.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 59. 個人の解放の立場に立つものは同時に没我的奉仕をなし得るものでなくてはならず、献身的な奉仕の立場に立つものは同時に断乎として全体的なものを否定し得るものでなくてはならない。それのないところでは、自由は単なる動物的な放縦、もしくは隷属に墜し去るのである。

He applies the dual-structure to the idea of freedom here—freedom from both ego and herd—and thus, clearly spells out the role of the individual that is neither isolated from nor submerged in totality.

Further, Watsuji argues that only via negating totality can there be freedom and progress in history. All progress—be it in scholarship, art, religion, morality, or the state—is through pioneers who defy the status quo of totality and steer history. But this negation is not a willful act of a selfish individual, but rather, the individual intuiting the unrealized form that the community ought to take, and then bringing that form into realization.⁶⁹ Thus, the way totality ought to be comes to the fore only *through the realization by individuals*. As such, history can be said to move by the dual-structure of *ningen*: history is the will of totality, but one that can only precipitate through the self-consciousness of individuals. Realistically, Watsuji also recognizes that society may not recognize this realization of the individuals, thus leading to conflict between society and the very innovators that serve society—pointing to an awareness of Watsuji of the problem of conflict in social change.⁷⁰

As such, we see why the negation of totality in order to realize individuality and self-consciousness is so important for Watsuji—individuals are the source of insight into the direction in which history ought to proceed. This depicts a clear *formative* determination by the individual of totality. And, in light of Watsuji’s dark post-war situation, which he sees as desperately needing a “prophet” (*yogensha*) to realize its historical significance, he directly addresses the reader: “You, do you not want that? If you do, then you, get up,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61-64.

on your own. With the power of just one person, you can save the eternal significance of [this] age from shame and disgrace.”⁷¹ While perhaps the idea of a prophet or a pioneer (like a Buddha or a Christ) makes his qualifications of a leader seem a bit out of reach, his direct address to the reader perhaps hints at the possibility of elements of insight and leadership within each one of us.

3.3 National Morality

The movement toward one humankind places a moral imperative upon nations. As I have mentioned, nations need to form an international political, economic, and cultural order. But as a prerequisite of this inter-national ought, there is an intra-national ought that needs to be fulfilled. Nations must become truly ethical (*sittliche*) communities that order and protect the families, local communities, and cultural communities beneath them. It is within these nation-states and communities that ethical life is lived out. But the historico-climatic particularity of national existence shapes the very ethical life within it:

All moralities up to the present were put up as *universal morality* (*fuhenteki na dôtoku*). However, because these were realized (*jikaku serareru*) under historical and medial/climatic (*fûdoteki*) constraints, then de facto, [these moralities] are expressed with *particular characteristics*.⁷²

His argument here repeats that of earlier essays entitled “Theory of National Morals” (1932) and “Universal Morality and National Morals” (1937).⁷³ In these, he basically ar-

⁷¹ Ibid., 81. 汝はそれを欲しないか。しからば汝ただ一人起て。汝ただ一人の力によって時代の永遠の意義を恥辱のなかから救い上げることができる。

⁷² Ibid., 347-348. 既成道徳は普遍的な道徳として立てられたのである。しかもそれは、歴史的・風土的な制約の下に自覚せられたものであるがゆえに、事実上特殊な性格を持って現れてくる。

⁷³ Both articles are in WTZ23.

gues that, similar to the mechanism for cultural change, morality seeks universal principles (the absolute) and derives its moral authority from this trajectory. But in expressing universal morality within a particular milieu and historical position, the universal acquires a finite and particular expression as *a* national morality. What he thus creates is a concept for guiding action on a national level that belongs to both the finite totality and the absolute.

We will leave the detailed discussion of national and universal morality for Chapter IV in order to focus on the implications for the relationship of individuality and totality. As we mentioned in the discussion of *Ethics II*, Watsuji tended to negate absolute totality, thus preventing any universality that individuality could use as a base in order to critique society. Thus, the importance of the reassertion of universal morality here is that it reinstates universality but in a different form—not as an actual community of humankind but as an ideal unity-in-difference that is realized through finite totalities but goes beyond their actuality as a *telos*. The question is, who realizes this ideal and moves nations toward its realization? With Watsuji's image of the "prophet," the individual who realizes how totality ought to be, it is suggested that perhaps this universality might ground the *individual's* critique of the existing social configuration.

At the end of *Ethics III*, Watsuji himself criticizes the existing state of affairs in Japan. For instance, he criticizes the tendency of Japanese people to be fixated on a domineering form of filial piety from a child to his or her parents, at the expense of the relationship of husband and wife (more private family relations) and public virtues (public beyond family), and suggests the need to loosen these bonds. But he points out the difficulty of reforming this, because of how it ties with so many other facets of society—the lack of free interaction between young men and women, a lack of public spaces in urban

design, the architecture of wooden homes (which he singles out as being responsible for creating herd-men without individuality), and economic constraints on architecture.⁷⁴ Particularly telling is how these criticisms center around the lack of strong, critical individuality, both in the family, as well as in politics and academia.⁷⁵ Thus, not only is Watsuji arguing for a need for a greater realization of individuality in Japan, he is providing proof by example of the role individuals can play in the critique of society and in the realization of the universal ideal of unity-in-difference.

In summary, the third volume presents a new way of seeing double-negation as a synthesis of individuality and totality, a unity-in-difference that, through the various misadventures and excesses of totality and individuality in history, slowly comes into awareness. It also greatly strengthens the functioning of individuality, by showing how the progress of history is seen as relying on individuals who lead history and “prophets” who become aware of the significance of history. The idea of universal morality (as lensed through national morality) provides a possible base from which an individual can criticize finite totalities and guide socio-historical change. Watsuji’s own critiques of Japan demonstrate this function, as well as argue for the need for a stronger sense of individuality in Japan.

4 The Changing Historical Circumstances of *Ethics*

Looking at the discussions of the three volumes of *Ethics*, I hope it is clear that the balance of individuality and totality and their interpretations has shifted and wobbled through

⁷⁴ *WTZII*, 349-363.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 371-380.

those 12 years he spent writing. The first volume tried to structurally balance individuality and totality, but gave the individual almost no role in social change. This made the individual a largely obedient (but self-aware) member of communities. There were two conflicting models for the dialectics of individuality suggested here: the continuous negation model and the three-stage model. The second volume shifted the discourse largely to groups harmonized under the state, focused all virtues on the negation of individuality, and criticized the alterity of the individual. This suggested a third model for dialectics: a spiral ascent model. While a mechanism for change was finally introduced, it was restricted to the sphere of culture. But in the third volume, the individual is given a critical role as the eyes of totality—awakening to and guiding totality in its moments of communal effervescence. And a new interpretation of the cycle of double-negation sees the cycle as culminating in a synthesis of individuality and totality in a unity-in-difference.

This wobbling between a balanced negation of individuality and totality and a totality-leaning model is connected to the shifting between singularity-in-relation and a view of relationality (*aidagara*) that erases singularity. As one can see, when the singularity of the individual is maintained and there is an element within each that can never overlap with another, like in the case of cultural change (where there is a singular awakening to absolute emptiness) or in the image of the prophet (where there is a singular realization of the ideal of universal morality), then Watsuji is able to suggest a creative contribution from the individual to the whole. But when Watsuji overstresses the smooth and harmonious relationship between individuals and their total overlap in relationality, the individual tends to function merely as a functionary of the whole, without any critical contribution.

How are we to understand these shifts and differences? One way to understand this is that Watsuji himself was still groping to understand how his ethics of emptiness might play out. However, another possible way to interpret these shifts is to see them as Watsuji's response to shifting historical circumstances and political pressures—a matter that becomes clear when Watsuji is placed alongside his contemporaries in the Kyoto School of Philosophy.⁷⁶ Let us briefly examine the political contours of those times and Watsuji's place in the philosophical discourses therein.

4.1 Growing Pressures in Pre-War Japan

The first volume of *Ethics* was released in 1937. In this period, the interwar peace was quickly being replaced by growing international tensions and a drive within Japan to mobilize for possible war. In 1931, Japan had seized Manchuria, and in 1936 the mutiny of the First Division of the Imperial Guard had taken place. Shortly after the publication of *Ethics I*, full scale war would break out between China and Japan.⁷⁷

At universities, political pressures were considerable. The 1925 Peace Preservation Law was strengthened in 1928 to further suppress possible “enemies of the state.” In 1936, the Diet passed the Extraordinary Control Law for Seditious Literature.⁷⁸ These laws greatly limited academic freedom. The previous decade had seen several cases of

⁷⁶ Watsuji was no longer at Kyoto University during this period. But as he had been teaching at this school for years and was greatly influenced by Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, a comparison with these thinkers can be very illuminating.

For more on the historical background of this period, see Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Byron K. Marshall, *Learning to be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 119-120.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

professors pressured into resigning, and this worsened in the first half of the 1930s. For example, Takigawa Yukitoki (Kyoto University) and Minobe Tatsukichi (Tokyo University) would find themselves under attack (both professionally as well as physically) by members of the right.⁷⁹

We see these historical forces manifest in the other philosophical publications of that time. In 1934, Nishida Kitarô published two volumes of essays, of which one essay was “The Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West Seen from a Metaphysical Perspective.”⁸⁰ In this essay, we see Nishida redirecting his philosophical energies toward the problems of culture and the global order, where Japan, its culture, and its national polity (*kokutai*) become central concerns. Nishida scholars like James Heisig lament this period in Nishida’s thought as the beginning of his vain entry into the world of political philosophy and the dangerous waters therein.

At the same time, in 1934, Tanabe Hajime published his first draft of the idea of the logic of the specific (*shu no ronri*), and in 1937, had developed it in the direction of seeing a “racially-unified society as a specific substratum that mediates the relationship between particular individuals and the universal ideals of the human community.”⁸¹ Compared to Nishida, Tanabe was much more at home in the waters of political philosophy—but, needless to say, the tragedy that befell Nishida would not exempt Tanabe either.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 123-126.

⁸⁰ Translated in David Dilworth, Viglielmo Valdo, and Augustin Jacinto Zavala, trans. and eds. *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 21-36.

⁸¹ James Heisig, “Tanabe’s Logic of the Specific and the Spirit of Nationalism,” in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyôto School and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 255.

Looking at these two thinkers, we find a shared concern for the problems of Japanese particularity strongly emerging in these pre-war years. There seemed to be a new-found demand to establish the position of the state within their philosophical projects. Perhaps these shifts explain Watsuji's slight conservatism in considering the relationship between individuals and the society, or between citizens and the state in the first volume of *Ethics*.

Another important matter to consider is that, in this shift, Tanabe and Nishida would begin a debate that would undoubtedly influence Watsuji. Heisig writes, "Instead of establishing a link between the universal and the particular as Nishida had done, Tanabe's stress on the nation as the 'specificity' through which transformation takes place in the historical process actually provoked a conflict between the two thinkers."⁸² Partly because of the shifts and adjustments in the ideas of both thinkers, there is no consensus (even amongst Nishida and Tanabe specialists) as to the consistency and extent of the disagreement, and whether or not Nishida had successfully responded to Tanabe's critiques.⁸³ But there is some general agreement on the terms of conflict: Nishida's general focus on universality and Tanabe's on species (the non-rational substratum of the ethnos that determines the individual).

Despite Watsuji's refusal to cite or acknowledge Tanabe's theories or terminology (probably due to Watsuji's affiliation with Nishida), Watsuji was clearly influenced by

⁸² Ibid., 262.

⁸³ See Sugimoto Kôichi, "Tanabe Hajime's Logic of Species and the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarô: A Critical Dialogue within the Kyoto School," in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 52-67. While Sugimoto argues that Nishida successfully responds to Tanabe's critique by adjusting his theories to accommodate the species, Heisig and Cestari would maintain the irreconcilable difference of the two philosophies.

both members of the Kyoto School. We see that Watsuji's theories are often actually closer to Tanabe's. For instance, Watsuji stresses how the individual is always directly determined by the national totality (species) and how self-emptying occurs by the mutual negation of individuality and species. Thus, Watsuji's theory of emptiness is never a substratum (like Nishida's dialectical universal), but rather, is closer to Tanabe's absolute mediation as an "activity of absolute negation" (*zettai hitei no sayô*),⁸⁴ where "the one [individuality] could not be posited without the mediation of the other [totality]. . . . Absolute mediation means that any affirmation would be impossible without the mediation of negation. . . . Therefore it rejects anything immediate."⁸⁵ Furthermore, Watsuji would likely side with Tanabe in the critique of Nishida as seeing historical creation and the world's transformation as being directly through the individual.^{86, 87}

However, on other occasions, Watsuji's theories were closer to Nishida's, as when he discusses the "individual standing directly before the absolute" and then returning cre-

⁸⁴ Cestari, 62.

⁸⁵ Tanabe is cited in Sugimoto, 56. Bracketed comments indicate how Tanabe might be transposed to Watsuji.

⁸⁶ Cestari, 54.

⁸⁷ Watsuji's unspoken connections to Tanabe are so extensive that it would take another dissertation to fully thresh out its details. The connections between these two thinkers are briefly discussed by Ozaki Makoto, in *Introduction to the Philosophy of Tanabe: According to the English Translation of the Seventh Chapter of The Demonstratio of Christianity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1990), 29-30. However, these connections are not fully developed.

One important difference between Watsuji and Tanabe lies in the order of the three stages of absolute nothingness. In Cestari, 62, we find the following: ". . . The immediacy which negatively mediates this Absolute Nothingness is species, or the people (*minzoku*). This particular substrate (*kitaiteki shu*) is considered as the moment of self-alienation (*jiko sogai*) of absolute mediation (the rational, the universal) and as such it is opposed to the individual, which is the moment in which the universal returns to itself (*jiko fukki*)." Watsuji reverses the position of individuality and community, and sees community as the self-return of the absolute. This makes him seem more totalizing than Tanabe. Similarly, while Tanabe stresses the need to overcome the irrationality of closed society, Watsuji tends to more positively appraise this *Gemeinschaft*.

atively to community. Also, Watsuji's view of the "prophet leading history" is very similar to the 1941 lesson Nishida held in front of the emperor, where Nishida links individual creativity to the nation's participation in world history.⁸⁸ While a thoroughgoing analysis of the similarities and differences of these three thinkers is beyond the scope of this thesis, I wish to note here how Watsuji's "wobbling" toward and away from totalitarian tendencies is expressed in his position between Nishida and Tanabe, and the contentious relationship between the individual, the species, and the universal.

4.2 Wartime Madness

Let us proceed to the second volume of *Ethics*. The pre-revised edition was published in 1942, meaning that considerable portions of it were written in the time leading up to and right after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Japan's entry into the Pacific theatre of World War II. Japan was under immense pressure to mobilize. In 1938, the Diet passed the National General Mobilization Law, which banned writings that might "hinder the national general mobilization" in any way.⁸⁹ Around this time, the most vocal of the liberal and leftist members of Tokyo Imperial University were purged from academia—among them Yanaihara Tadao, Ôuchi Hyôe, and Kawai Eijirô. The new university president, Hiraga Yuzuru, strongly supported the war effort and clamped down hard on professors deemed unpatriotic.⁹⁰ This undoubtedly put a lot of pressure on Watsuji Tetsurô, whose frequent

⁸⁸ Cestari, 57.

⁸⁹ Marshall, 121.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-128.

engagement with works in western political theory could have been called into question at this time.

This pressure is clear in the philosophical writings of that period. In 1941, Nishida tried to rework his thought into the rudiments of political philosophy, and his general focus on the universal tended to tilt dangerously toward statism. We see this in “The Question of the Reason of the State” (*Kokka riyû no mondai*, 1941). This essay relates the “individual, ethnic group, and national polity as ever wider classes, the larger subsuming the opposition in the smaller into a kind of unity. In theory, this allows for a variety of races to co-exist in the same polity . . .”⁹¹ It also sees the state as a single family and sets it as the highest political unit. Here, morality, individual creativity, and the “global creation” of the individual are all strictly restricted determined by the specific.⁹² This article was quite a departure from Nishida’s usual approach, and was his most nationalistic. His topics also bear a striking resemblance to Watsuji’s *Ethics II*.

Tanabe was also at his most nationalist/statist in this period. In “The Logic of State Existence,” (*Kokkateki sonzai no ronri*, 1939) he writes:

My philosophy of the state may be said to possess a structure that radicalizes the dialectical truth of Christianity by liberating it, as it were, from the confines of myth and by putting the nation in the place of Christ. . . . Such a comparison, I think, helps better explain what I mean by asserting that our nation is the supreme archetype of existence and that, as a union of objective spirit and absolute spirit, it manifests the absolute as a Buddha-embodiment.⁹³

This was such an appalling departure from the original rational impetus of the logic of the species that Heisig writes, “There are no formal, rational grounds in Tanabe’s thought

⁹¹ James Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyôto School*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 96.

⁹² Cestari, 58-59.

⁹³ Cited in Heisig, “Tanabe’s Logic of the Specific,” 282.

to warrant the conclusion that the Japanese nation so viewed deserved a place of honor as a ‘supreme archetype’ in the larger scheme of things. . . . It is as if Tanabe were quoting himself out of context.”⁹⁴

Alongside his two teachers, another member of the Kyoto School was shifting to nationalistic philosophy. In 1941, Nishitani Keiji wrote *View of the World, View of the Nation*, wherein he reframed his generally mystical philosophy into one of the mutual awakening of citizen and state, and argued for the importance of a political standpoint of absolute nothingness. However, despite the support of this book for the *Principles of the National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongii*, 1936) and its defense of Japanese superiority, its attempt to situate Japan amidst a larger totality of Asia and world history earned him the ire of the special police and the army.⁹⁵

Aside from Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, we have other key philosophical publications in this period that reflect the madness of the time: *A World-Historical Standpoint and Japan* (*Sekaiishiteki tachiba to Nihon*, 1943) collated the results of the *Chûôkôron* Discussions (1941-1942), which included figures like Kôsaka Masaaki, Kôyama Iwao, and Suzuki Shigetaka. Additionally, the *Overcoming Modernity* symposium was held in 1942. Both discussions supported Japanese moral superiority and its imperial “leadership” of Asia.

Considering this overall intellectual climate, the relative conservativeness of *Ethics II* is not entirely unexpected. Watsuji strongly subordinated the citizen to the state, and refused to subordinate Japan to any external order. We see this in Watsuji’s other

⁹⁴ Ibid., 283.

⁹⁵ Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 195-200.

wartime works as well: *The Thought on Reverence for the Emperor and Its Tradition* (1943) and *The Way of the Japanese Subject and America's National Character* (1944).

In *The Way of the Japanese Subject*, we see Watsuji attributing self-negation—breaking through to a standpoint that “transcends death and life”—to the selfless service to the emperor. This would seem like the perfect evidence for the imperialist totalitarianism of *Ethics II*. However, interestingly, even here, he differentiates the worship of the emperor from the worship of god (in Christianity or Islam) by saying that the former is more tolerant than the latter, for the former is a religion of absolute nothingness, that does not reject other religions as a religion of absolute being would. This suggests a vision of “pluralistic cosmopolitanism,” supported by an absolute that accepts difference, which would become clearer in *Ethics III*. (This will be developed in Chapter IV.) So while he (suddenly) declares his support for the imperial task of making other nations venerate the Japanese emperor, this shift seems remarkably out of place.⁹⁶ At least in his theoretical work, Watsuji believed in the independent self-formation of nations all throughout. Therefore, he can be interpreted as refusing imperial expansion—unlike many other members of the Kyoto School.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Watsuji Tetsurô, “The Way of the Japanese Subject,” in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*, trans. ed. David Dilworth, Viglielmo Valdo, and Augustin Jacinto Zavala (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 283-285.

⁹⁷ Watsuji wrote several memos on the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (1942, see WTZb2, 450-458), and he also participated in the authorship of *Fundamentals of Our National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongî*), which was published in 1937 by the Ministry of Education. These political (propaganda) works, coupled with the previously mentioned books in support of the war effort, genuinely complicate this issue. For example, in “Opinions on the Construction of Greater East Asia” (*Daitôa kensetsu ni kansuru iken*), he seems to support the move to create this co-prosperity sphere, and acknowledges the moral importance of supporting the war that makes the creation of this sphere possible. But at the same time, he argues on the importance of helping each nation attain its *own* place and the moral and cultural flourishing of each nation in its own *specific* ways, while maintaining respect for each tradition and culture. So it is difficult to see if he is really supporting imperialism, or if he is trying to steer a force he feels he cannot stop. For a more detailed discussion on Watsuji and these wartime pieces, see the following:

Watsuji had to completely revise the second volume of *Ethics* after the war (1946). The omissions from the introduction as well as the discussion of the state show the kind of political pressures Watsuji was dealing with—but whether it was the pre-revised version under militarist pressures or the revised version under the watchful eye of the American rule that was the “real Watsuji” is hard to tell. Having said that, it is imaginable that in a wartime situation, it would be expedient to stress individual obedience to the state and restrict any form of social change to something less controversial—like culture.

4.3 Philosophizing in the Aftermath

The third volume was published in 1949, shortly after the dissolution of the Empire of Japan in 1947 and under the occupation of the Supreme Command Allied Powers (SCAP). Under orders of the occupation, the Ministry of Education had purged “all persons who are known to be militaristic, ultra-nationalistic, or antagonistic to the objectives and policies of the Occupation.”⁹⁸ Educational reform was one of the main tenets of the SCAP, and from elementary school to university, there was a strong push to stamp out the old “authoritarian” ways of thinking in Japan, and cultivate a spirit of democracy, individuality, and freedom.⁹⁹

Chiara Brivio, *The Human Being: When Philosophy Meets History: Miki Kiyoshi, Watsuji Tetsurō and their Quest for a New Ningen* (Zutphen, Netherlands: Wöhrmann Print Service, 2009), 198-207.

Brivio presents a rather convincing critique of Watsuji’s thought, showing that from the point of view of *political history*, Watsuji’s ideas were fundamentally tied to the *eschaton* of Japan, and thus Watsuji’s thought was defeated along with Japan during the war. While I do not disagree with this, I do not think that this precludes the possibility that there may be positive uses and re-readings of Watsuji from the point of view of *ethical theory*. And as I will continuously argue in this dissertation, I think Watsuji is internally inconsistent and thus has plural hermeneutic possibilities. Thus I must disagree with Brivio’s tendency to close the door on Watsuji and see him as consistently totalitarian and Japanist.

⁹⁸ Marshall, 146.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

By this point, Nishida was dead, Tanabe was undergoing his great repentance (as seen in his 1946 publication, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*), and Nishitani swore off political involvement altogether. Amidst the moral trauma of the post-war period, Watsuji himself claims to have had a very difficult time composing his thoughts, repeatedly having to throw away drafts before he was able to write a workable manuscript. His view of international relations, which was fiercely critical in the wartime volume, had become suspiciously optimistic, making one wonder if political pressures were not equally strong—but in the opposite direction. Perhaps this situation might have been the most amenable for Watsuji's more liberal ideas—if academicians were not flat-out compelled to write along liberal, or at least democratic lines.¹⁰⁰

Despite these liberal pressures and the frequency of critiques of the Japanese nation-state, Nishida, Tanabe, and Watsuji have something in common that they never abandoned despite the changing of the tide: their reverence for the emperor. Shortly before the end of the war—a month before Nishida died—Tanabe wrote Nishida with a plan to protect the emperor system and the emperor's symbolic representation of absolute nothingness. While this plan was never enacted, Nishida agreed with it in principle (and so did Kôyama Iwao).¹⁰¹ Like these members of the Kyoto School, Watsuji saw the emperor system as essential to the unity of Japan and wrote *The Symbol of National Unity* (1948) in support of this. He also kept these ideas central in his proposed reforms for Japan in *Ethics III*.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Although it is important to note that while Watsuji's post-war ideas were more liberal relative to his previous ideas, he was much more conservative than other thinkers around him. He strongly opposed the Marxist turn and he seemed to ally himself with conservatives. See *WTZ11*, 373.

¹⁰¹ Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 151-153.

¹⁰² For more on Watsuji and the emperor system, see Brivio, 164-176.

I do not wish to provide an apology for Watsuji, or excuse him from his failure to respond more forcefully to the ethical abuses of the Japanese empire during his time. What I do wish to show is the important fact that Watsuji's was a systematic work on a universal ethical principle that transcends differences of history and culture while being expressed in them. Yet it was itself subject to a great amount of change and revision in the face of historical and cultural pressures, in a sense fulfilling his theory that all expressions of the universal are particular.

However, these shifts admittedly make it very difficult to know what Watsuji was *really* wanting to say. People are not self-identities free from contradiction, and surely Watsuji was not exempt from this. So perhaps it is unreasonable to try to draw a single, consistent stance from Watsuji's *Ethics*. But some things *can* be said to be consistent in Watsuji's *Ethics*: Watsuji consistently recognized the importance of both individuality and totality, and their negative relationship with each other. Also, beneath all the changes, Watsuji never fails to assert the need for some form of individual self-awareness, and a succeeding reintegration of this self into the totality. But as we have seen, the details of the functioning of individuality and totality, their negation, and how much is gained and lost in their tensional dialectics—these things remain contested in Watsuji's thought.

5 Contemporary Analysis: The Liberal-Communitarian Debates

Watsuji struggled with the notion of individuality and totality, and behind it was the concrete struggle between the citizen and the nation-state that loomed large during a time punctuated by the horrors of war. While there are some who would dismiss Watsuji for wobbling and his support of nationalism in Japan, I think it is important to note that the

question of the relationship between the citizen and the nation-state *is by no means closed*, not even in our contemporary period which is largely dominated by democracy. Yes, Watsuji struggled with the problem of individuality and totality and his idea of the “negative dual-structure” by no means put away these problems. But we, too, continue to struggle with the same problem up until today. This problem crops up in many discourses from poststructuralism to Marxism to postsecularism, but it is best highlighted in what we call the “liberal-communitarian debates.”

The liberal-communitarian debates became central to political theory in the Anglosphere in the 1980s. This debate began largely with the publication of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which was then criticized by Michael Sandel in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982). This critique got the ball rolling for these debates, and other philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer contributed their own critiques of liberalism, to which Rawls and other liberals responded, and other philosophers like Richard Rorty, Ronald Dworkin and Joseph Raz gave their own input from a more balanced perspective between liberalism and communitarianism. The main matter at stake in these debates was the question of the relationship of the individual to the state, and the relationship of this to other communities the individual might be part of.

To very briefly summarize the argument of each side, liberals are primarily committed to the autonomy of the individual, and the state thus protects the ability of the individual to choose for him or herself, even when it comes to membership in particular groups (like religions or other associations). Communitarians, on the other hand, do not

think that one can abstract the individual from the groups he/she is part of, thus making such a fixation on individual autonomy misplaced.¹⁰³

How are we to place Watsuji in these debates? Several scholars like Steve Odin, Gino Piovesana, William LaFleur, and Alastair Swale have suggested that Watsuji ought to be read as a communitarian.¹⁰⁴ However, more interestingly, John C. Maraldo and Luke Dorsey place Watsuji as an attempt to go beyond *both* the liberal and the communitarian position. Let us examine the arguments of the latter two and relate them with our previous discussion.

Let us begin with how Watsuji might respond to liberalism. Maraldo writes:

Both [Watsuji and communitarians] question individual autonomy and propose a social metaphysics that defines the person in terms of community relationships. Both criticize universalistic ethics. . . Watsuji implicitly and communitarians explicitly dispute the priority of rights and the idea that particular conceptions of the good life should be confined to the private sphere.¹⁰⁵

As we have seen, Watsuji's very goal with his *Ethics* was to resist the reduction of ethics to matters of individual's freedom, values, and judgment. Watsuji directs individuals toward communities, and not merely toward their own ends. Thus, the idea of the good as being "private" and the distinction between justice and ethics would be unthinkable—the good is always expressed in public existence.

¹⁰³ Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), xii-xiii.

¹⁰⁴ Odin, *The Social Self*, 51, 314.

LaFleur, "An Ethics of As-Is."

Alastair Swale, "The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsurô: A Reappraisal of Western and Eastern Influences," in *Morals and Society in Asian Philosophy*, ed. Brian Carr, 37-53. (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996.)

¹⁰⁵ John C. Maraldo, "Watsuji Tetsurô's Ethics: Totalitarian or Communitarian?" in Rolf Elberfeld and Günter Wohlfart eds., *Komparative Ethik. Das „Gute Leben“ in Asien und Europa* (Edition Chora: Köln, 2002), 181.

I am in agreement with Maraldo's suggestion that Watsuji's greatest contribution to communitarianism is the radical critique of individualist metaphysics through his view of the individual as "empty." Maraldo writes, "The individual is not, by itself, a human being. From the beginning, we exist in relationships that oscillate between the poles of individuality and community."¹⁰⁶ Through Watsuji, it is possible to then construct a communitarian critique that is metaphysically radical and that provides a consummately trans-individual ethical theory.

Luke Dorsey largely seconds Maraldo's arguments. But unfortunately, neither of them delves too deeply into the second and third volumes of *Ethics*, where I am certain they would find much of their findings validated and further supported. For instance, we have seen in *Ethics II* that virtue is seen as necessarily situated within a particular community and thus does not belong to an abstract "virtuous individual." We also saw in Watsuji's critique of universal humanity that the idea of the generic "individual" can be merely abstract—true ethics must be expressed in finite communities through finite media. Furthermore, Watsuji's criticism of the *Gesellschaft* state directly applies to liberalism: Its focus on the individual's private ends erodes the very self-emptying that makes society possible. This would lead to a rethinking of the ideas of rights and justice: In this framework, rights are freedoms *for totality* that safeguard the capacity of an individual to participate meaningfully in various communities, rather than the rights that protect an individual from the "impositions of totality." Justice, too, is finding one's place—and not merely fair access to individual goods.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 182.

Thus, it makes sense that many thinkers would consider Watsuji a communitarian thinker. But Dorsey and Maraldo add that a lot of Watsuji's ideas go beyond communitarianism. Maraldo sees two main points here: First, communitarians are usually criticized for moral relativism due to a lack of universal norms. While Watsuji did criticize the liberal mode of universal morality, he offers a very different kind of universal morality. Maraldo writes, "I suggest that Watsuji implicitly shifts the grounds of universalism from content to structure Recall his fundamental law of human be-ing, which is clearly intended as a descriptive universal structure."¹⁰⁷ As I will detail in the next chapter, Watsuji provides an interesting model for universal ethics that both respects the cultural differences of finite totalities while refusing moral relativism—thus placing him beyond the liberal-communitarian debate. A second point Maraldo raises is that Watsuji also better sees the complexities of communal life: "He did recognize the complexity of communal existence by placing communities in a progression of greater wholes."¹⁰⁸

I myself have doubts if the stages of human organization necessarily account for the complexities of role strain and cultural heterogeneity. But I think, in some ways, Watsuji was able to overcome the naïve view of a simple communal whole that informs the individual—especially in his view of the individual's *creative rethinking* of the shared media of relationships. Thus, Watsuji sees culture not merely as given but as constantly created and renegotiated. This is something that aligns with Luke Dorsey's suggestion: "The similarities between Watsuji's betweenness and the communitarian bond with com-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 190.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

munity are only superficial. At the heart of Watsuji's betweenness is not simply obligation to community, but a 'double negation', of both the individual and society."¹⁰⁹ This is especially clear in *Ethics III*, where the negation of society is not merely through passive participation but through transformative critique and leading change.

I would go so far as to argue that Watsuji's ideas even have a *liberal* twist: While identifying with a community is important, it must not get in the way of one's ability to critically see past it and approach the absolute directly. And while Watsuji's idea of freedom is one of selflessness rather than a "rational pursuit of one's interests," it still contains (at least in its later forms) that critical moment of *liberté*, from which the individual can try to transform a community, leave it, or form a new one. Also, as we saw in the discussion of *kokorozukai* (consideration), Watsuji's notion of the particularity of finite totalities does require that one respect the ability of others to decide for their own finite particularities the best way to enact the absolute. While this is not the liberal "neutrality with respect to the good life," it contains an element of that.

I think it is arguable that while Watsuji has many communitarian elements, he can be read as going beyond the liberal-communitarian debates. Perhaps it is possible to explore further (in another work) how Watsuji might then contribute to particular philosophers in this debate, or how he would compare to others who try to transcend this debate as well—like Will Kymlicka, for instance.

¹⁰⁹ Luke Dorsey, "A Japanese Ethics of Double Negation: Watsuji Tetsurô's Contribution to the Liberal-Communitarian Debate." In *Otherwise: A Journal of Student Philosophy* (2007). [Article on-line] http://otherwise.philosophystudentassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Dorsey_luke.pdf

However, we have also seen in this chapter that Watsuji was by no means consistent on this matter. There are parts of Watsuji that assert a very passive, functionary individual, that assert the harmony of various sectors of the state and the absolute obedience of the citizen to it. In these sections, one could argue that Watsuji was a communitarian through and through—if not a *totalitarian* altogether. Thus, the reading of Maraldo and Dorsey is a *partial* reading. Only if one focuses on the desubstantialization of *both* individuality and totality from the point of view of emptiness is one able to dissolve the metaphysical starting point of both liberalism and communitarianism. And if one focuses on how, within this emptiness, individuality and totality relate through continuous and creative negation, it becomes possible to show how liberal and communitarian elements might interact positively.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the dual-structure of individuality and totality is central to Watsuji's ethics, and it has certain core features: the dual structure of individuality and totality, their negative relation, and the non-substantiality of each pole. However, despite these constants, there is, in truth, a very large amount of inconsistency within Watsuji's *elaboration* of this core, particularly between the pre-war, wartime, and post-war volumes of *Ethics*. The key differences we have seen above are tied to how negation is carried out, the possibility for social change and individual contributions to it, and how the dialectics of emptiness is structured. These inconsistencies have to be understood within the very difficult context of World War II.

However, despite these inconsistencies, we have also seen that it is possible for Watsuji's unique approach to the human being to contribute to the liberal-communitarian

III. INDIVIDUALITY AND TOTALITY

debates that continue to rage in the Anglosphere. But this contribution requires a selective reading of Watsuji—like that carried out by Maraldo and Dorsey—that focuses on a view of the dialectics of emptiness as an unresolved and non-reductive but *creative* tension between individuality and totality, and pushes back the totalitarian tendencies of Watsuji's thought.

The discussion of liberalism and communitarianism has begun to highlight certain contested ideas: liberalism's purported universality, the notion of the "universal" individual, the situatedness of the individual in finite communities, the particular values of a group, and so on. In other words, it has slowly highlighted the clash between universality and particularity, which we turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter IV. The Universal and the Particular in Global Ethics

In the previous chapter, one point of contention between liberals and communitarians had to do with whether ethics is universal or relative to communities. Liberals generally argue for the former and communitarians for the latter. Maraldo has suggested that Watsuji might have a way of going beyond this conundrum by “shift[ing] the grounds of universalism from content to structure.”¹ In this chapter, I follow this lead and focus on the question of the universal and particular in morality, which, when directly addressed, pulls together a wide range of issues in Watsuji’s work.

In Chapters II and III, I emphasized the dual-negative structure of human existence, focusing on how this dynamic plays out between the individual and the various groups he/she is part of—the various levels of social organization, from the family to the comprehensive and sovereign state. But as I have pointed out, it becomes clear in *Ethics III* that this cycle is only a smaller cycle within a larger cycle, for the sovereign state is but an “individual” amongst other individuals in the international space that is the world.

In this chapter, I argue that, by moving to this larger cycle, Watsuji Tetsurô is shifting from an ethics of community—which studies the principle of human existence as it plays out amidst individuals and the concrete communities they live in—to a more ambitious *global ethics*. But such an ethics is fundamentally a contested one: International

¹ Maraldo, 190.

relations realism long argued that relations between nations were fundamentally anarchic and amoral, the relations between nations being largely a “bloody business.” This caused a good deal of resistance to the birth of “normative international relations theory.” Furthermore, global ethics takes on both the problems of ethical systems around the globe vs. the possibility of unifying them in either a cosmopolitan manner or otherwise—landing us straight into the problem of cosmopolitanism vs. particularism and the challenge of intercultural dialogue.

An additional problem arises from the fact that Watsuji’s ethics considers the temporal/historical milieu of each act. Thus, a global ethics would have to consider the emplacement of each act within *world history*. Here, there is the foreboding of a great many issues: Is world history not something entirely beyond ethics? Does it not focus on the *specific*—concrete communities, events, and movements—so much so as to frustrate any attempt to understand it vis-à-vis principles? After Hegel, the discipline of “philosophy of history” slowly lost legitimacy, and came to be seen as an unattainable goal of intellectual hubris. In light of that, an “ethics of world history” would be laughable.

However, if ethics is the study of the principles of relational existence, then the unavoidable fact is that relations *clearly exceed* the lines of the nation-state. This is most clear in the age of globalization, but it was already evident for Japan after the fall of the Tokugawa and the mad rush of the Meiji restoration. Watsuji’s ethics was *born* in this global space, dynamically integrating influences from German, Greek, French, Chinese, and Indian thought. Thus, the problem of global ethics, no matter how complicated and pernicious it might be, was unavoidable for Watsuji, as it is for those of us who see relations as the ground of ethics. And if we see ethical relations as continuing in time, then we have no choice but to try to navigate the shifting sands of world history yet again.

In this chapter, I will begin with an examination of the *specific* (or particular) moment of ethics—of the interplay of ethics and the historical life of a concrete, spatio-temporally situated people (*minzoku*, De. *Volk*). Then, I will proceed to Watsuji's response to the discourse on national morals, in which he directly addresses the dilemma of universality and particularity. Third, I will proceed to an examination of ethics in global space and in world history, considering how Watsuji's vision of universal-particular ethics might be realized. I will end with a reexamination of Watsuji's ideas in response to the contemporary discourses of global ethics, particularly the problem of moral relativism and cosmopolitan universalism.

1 Situating Ethics in Space and Time

Watsuji attempted to establish the concreteness of his ethics from the very beginning of his systematic project. Even in the methodological ground-laying of *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, we see traces of this attempt. For instance, Watsuji's appropriation of Ludwig Feuerbach and (more importantly) Karl Marx stems from his attempt to counter the idealistic and abstract tendencies of Immanuel Kant, Hermann Cohen, and Georg Hegel. With the two materialists, Watsuji seeks to retrieve the focus on embodied, practical relationships that are situated in concrete society—not just of fellow-feeling or a Kingdom of Ends, but a real society driven by shared struggles with nature, economic production, and other concrete ways of life.²

Furthermore, the very method of ethics as hermeneutics meant an interpretation of the concrete expressions of *ningen sonzai* found in everyday life—social structures,

² This is particularly clear in *WTZ9*, 120-122.

institutions, products, production, economic exchange, language, material culture, and so on. Because of this focus, Watsuji found himself allied with the social sciences—particularly sociology and anthropology—rather than a mere abstract philosophy of society or philosophical anthropology.

The development of these traces takes a leap in *Ethics I*. After Watsuji’s discussion of an arguably abstract fundamental law of the self-negation and self-return of emptiness, Watsuji attempts to re-ground this ethics in concrete life through the ideas of space and time. On one hand, he shows the fundamentally inter-subjective character of space and time (rather than as merely subjective or objective categories). On the other hand, Watsuji is trying to emphasize how it is ridiculous to think of *ningen sonzai* separate from space and time, and it is here where we see Watsuji’s commitment to concreteness and specificity.

Watsuji’s notion of the spatiality of *ningen* necessarily begins with the notion of “subjective bodies.” Here, we find a strong rejection of the whole tradition of mind-body dualism (especially in Descartes).³ All of the “connections of meaning” that give human life its subjective richness come from physical bodies interacting in space. Watsuji asserts, “It is not that there is a subjective *Thou* who exists apart from *Thou* as a natural object.”⁴ Because we are “subjective bodies,” the movements of unifying and individualizing are necessarily tied to space. Friends literally draw close to one another. Local communities gather near each other, and their subjective interconnections are revealed in physical space—in the layout of the village, in the paths that connect their houses and their places

³ This is something Erin McCarthy has discussed in feminist terms, but it seems to me Watsuji’s own usage of the non-duality of body and mind is less Buddhist, and not feminist, but rather, Marxist.

⁴ *WTZ10*, 163 (156).

of work, and so on. As the relationships of people extend beyond a small town, this, too, is reflected in longer roads—prefectural roads, national roads, highways, trains, maritime or air routes, and so on. Similarly, communication is also part of how people draw close to each other in a mediated way. Note that communication is not disembodied—from a simple letter to the flow of electrons translated into sound on a telephone, to the flow of photons in an optical cable translated to a twitter post on the internet—all these involve something physical, reaching out across space, in order to allow two people to connect as subjective bodies.

Therefore, we cannot then think of the movement of double-negation—negating totality and negating individuality—separate from the movement of bodies in space, and the concrete ideas of transportation and communication. Individualization is concrete: One “gets some space” by literally going away or taking a walk, one moves out of the house when one comes of age, and so on. In the same way, for the most part, married couples live together, and their children with them—and it would be difficult to think of them as a “concrete totality” if the father is in Manila, the mother in Los Angeles, and the children with some aunt in a distant province. (Or at least, while they might desire to be a totality, we see how the physical arrangement can create a genuine barrier here.)

Similarly, Watsuji seeks to situate human existence in time. He describes the basic structure of temporality as follows:

Ningen sonzai is subjectively extended. On the other hand, as a subjective connection, this extendedness must possess a structure that, although shouldering the established betweenness, aims at achieving a possible betweenness in and through its present activities. That is to say, subjective extendedness [space] is temporal in structure.⁵

⁵ Ibid., 196 (186)

“Established betweenness” here refers to Watsuji’s notion of the past. Every action in the present is a response to a pre-existing state of affairs in one’s relational life. The past, seen neither as an objective nor merely private sense of the past, but as the concrete past that is the context of each action, is a *relational past*. The future, then, is a “possible betweenness”—a relational future, which is aimed at by a particular action. Watsuji takes up the simple example of going to work—it bears the relational past of having been hired by someone and thus being employed, and aims at the relational future of perhaps continuing or changing this relationship with one’s employer.

Thus, the spatiality of the negative dual-structure is also necessarily temporal: negating totality and negating individuality are both accomplished by acting a certain way in response to the present relationship and aiming toward a change in the relationship, either toward individuation or toward unification.

Seen hyperbolically, time itself can be seen as a movement of return to absolute emptiness through the established and possible relationships one experiences:

An established betweenness is, in its extreme, the absolute wholeness that consists of the nonduality of the self and the other; that is, the authentic countenance prior to the birth of one’s parents, as is said in Zen Buddhism.

By bringing to realization the nondual relationship between self and other, we return to our authentic homeground. This ultimate ground out of which we come is the ultimate *terminus ad quem* to which we return. . . . The temporal structure of *ningen sonzai* is, in the final analysis, the exhibition of this authenticity.⁶

Here, Watsuji is asserting that relatedness, the unity of self and other, is the original and authentic (*eigentlich*) state of the human being. As such, he sees the present as a state of “alienation” (from this original connectedness) which we try to overcome by committing ourselves to relationships. But what kind of relationship allows us to truly return to this

⁶ Ibid., 195-196 (187).

authentic relatedness? This will become clearer later in this chapter, in our discussion of *Ethics III*.

Having thus rooted *ningen sonzai* in space and time (and vice-versa), Watsuji points out that the ethicality of acts does not lie merely in the personal virtues they express, nor in the maxim behind them, but in their *spatial and temporal situatedness* and their capacity to respond to concrete trust relationships. Therefore, the analysis of an ethical act must first consider—How does this act express and affect the relationship of the subjective bodies involved? What relational past does this act bear and toward what relational future does it aim? How does it respond to the embodied and dynamic call of trust? Watsuji says: “We live in the midst of acts. And each act stands within the context of manifold and inexhaustible connections. Even when we extract a fragment and investigate it, we must not forget that even this fragment arises from the aforementioned connections as its inexhaustible background.”⁷

In *Ethics II*, we see these spatio-temporal interactions of subjective bodies forming growing networks of human relationship from the family beneath one roof, to the town within one circle of economic life, to one nation with a specific culture in response to shared territory and shared history. Again, part of the specificity of ethics lies in the *mediated* character of these networks. Because of the embodiment of human beings, bonds between persons are built through the things that are shared within a specific sphere—from the total sharing of a couple, to the shared labors of a community, to the sharing of cultural products and symbols in a nation. Those who share in these are *in-*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 256 (244).

cluded in that network, and those who do not are *excluded*. For instance, a lover of literature can share this passion with other lovers of literature—but only within the bounds of that kind of literature. Fans of young adult fiction (like *Twilight*) have little in common with avid readers of Shakespeare, let alone with those who have spent a lifetime reading *The Tales of Genji* in Japanese. Thus, this logic of mediated relationships expresses the closed, particular, and *specific* notion of human connectivity.

It is due to the specificity of these human networks and their media that Watsuji seeks virtues as specific to a particular level of *sittliche* organization. It is expected of husband and wife that they relate to each other with total participation. However, this total participation is exclusive to the couple—nobody expects a man to have “total participation” with his neighbor. As a matter of fact, that would be considered *unvirtuous*, a breach of the total exclusivity that goes along with total participation. Similarly, one might argue that, while mutual service through economic goods would be considered virtuous in economic relations, it would be problematic if siblings related to each other in this purely transactional manner.

While Watsuji does not go into the specifics of the dangers of misapplying virtues, it is clear that the virtues he suggests are specific to the level of relation and the nature of the shared medium. This is a very different approach to virtue from many debates in the Anglosphere. Let us take the one surrounding the application of justice in the family and care in the state, for instance. In Watsuji, virtues are not universal but specific.

I think Watsuji’s attempt to emplace ethics within space, time, and mediated trust networks is particularly useful for us in the age of globalization and information. The landscape of transportation (migration, high speed transport, low-cost air travel) and com-

munication (the internet, video conferencing) are changing rapidly and placing new demands on the relationships between human beings. Watsuji's model allows us to think how these might translate to ethical demands. For example, is migrant labor a betrayal of the trust relationships between the migrant and his dependents? Can video conferencing sufficiently support 'distance parenting'? Is telecommunication a right? These questions are very difficult to address from purely rational forms of ethics that do not consider concrete embeddedness directly. Also, technology is creating new spaces—international direct trading, internet dating, anonymous discussion boards, Facebook, Twitter—all of which have particular media (anonymity, short messages, pictures) that *mediate* the relationships that occur therein. As we construct new moral rules (about privacy, cyber-bullying, norms of discussion), Watsuji again provides us a model for virtues emplaced within mediated trust relationships.

2 Specifying History, Climate, and National Existence

In *Ethics I* and *II*, ethics is thus specified within space and time and within specific human networks. In *Ethics III*, Watsuji brings this specificity to its fulfillment, where space is *this place*, and time is *this period of time*. Thus, space and time develop into a specific notion of *milieuity* (or climaticity) and *historicity* of particular nations (*kokumin*).

2.1 Historicity

Let us begin with the notion of temporality and examine how it develops into historicity.

Watsuji writes:

Because *ningen sonzai* has this dynamic structure, it necessarily is realized as *sittliche* organizations. Therefore, subjective practical connections are concretized through the

various stages (family, local community, cultural community, state, etc.), which is, at the same time, the *concretization of temporality*.⁸

A relational past and a relational future cannot be abstracted from the various networks of relations created by this relational temporality and the temporal fabric they constitute. Thus, as a family member, my relational past is situated within the *history* of my family. The sharing in various experiences, from child-rearing, to the various struggles undergone together, to the various joys and celebrations—this shared relational past binds the temporalities of each member of the family into a shared temporality. This shared past, irreducible to any single member’s past, nor the mere sum of their pasts, forms each member, as well as their relationship to another as a “subjective determination.”⁹

In the same way, the family has a shared future—shared concerns for the future of the children, perhaps worries about caring for the parents as they age, and so on. For Watsuji, this shared future is not in the realm of what *is* but in the realm of what *ought to be*, and each member thinks of what to do—as a father, mother, son, or daughter—in relation to this shared future. Watsuji very strongly argues for the specificity of this ought: “These things that ought to be done are not exhausted by a generally prescribed way of acting as the way of parents and children. The past has carved out this parent-child relation in a specific form. Therefore, *what ought to be* should also be determined by this form.”¹⁰ Thus, each family has its own way of carrying out into the future, in response to

⁸ *WTZII*, 5. 人間存在はかかる動的構造を有するがゆえに必然に人倫的組織として実現せられる。従って主体的実践的連関が家族、地縁共同体、文化共同体、国家等の諸段階を通じて具体化せられることは、同時に時間性の具体化にほかならない。

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8. そのなすべきことは親子の道として一般的に規定された行為の仕方に尽きるのではない。過去はこの親子の連関を特定の姿に刻み出した。従ってなすべきこともまたこの姿に即して限定されなくてはならない。

its own history. (This can be seen in relation to the virtue of *kokorozukai*. Because each family has its own particular historicity, it is necessary for members of the neighborhood to take care not to interfere into matters that are specific to the self-determination of the family.)

Similarly, the relational past and relational future are concretized in every other level of social organization. In a local community, people grow up together, share in their labors and in the struggles the community goes through. This determines a particular vision of how the town ought to be, how it ought to respond to changes, and so on. In a cultural community, people share in the history of ways in which members have realized the absolute. Whether it is their experience of God, of the saints, and of the Church (as in Christianity) or the history of philosophical questions and the eternal dialogue in response to it, with milestones drawn by great thinkers, from Aristotle to Kant and Hegel and so on—all of these form a concrete cultural history that shapes the present of each member. These thus drive the members to realize the absolute in their own way, but also in response to the particular form and expression of this tradition.

But this leads Watsuji to an epistemological problem: The past consists of an infinite number of events that shape a particular relationship, and thus bears an unfathomable plenitude of possibilities as well. Can this infinite manifold even be called “history?”

Watsuji writes:

The self-conscious activity of *ningen* does not end idly before the overflowing depth of actuality. No matter how rich the past may be, it consists in *facts that are already disclosed*, and it is possible to arrange and unify these. The future is infinitely rich as well, but by grasping the ought by [its] fundamental principles, that reality can be

regulated. The former attempt results in “history,” and the latter attempt in “the way” (*michi*).¹¹

History is the *organization* and *unification* of history, just as the ethical path of a community is the unification of the possibilities of the future.

The task of unifying history (whether it is on a smaller level of social organization or by the state) points to a process of *historical interpretation*. Watsuji points out that both natural and historical epistemology are processes of selective synthesis (*sentakuteki sôgô*) that try to simplify the unrecognizably dense plenitude of reality through a process of whittling down to what is seen as its essential facets. He writes,

In the case of historical inquiry, epistemology is directed towards the understanding of individual (*kobetsuteki*) realities. . . . Here, the concern is with the *individual*, the *particular*, the *but once and unrepeatable* singular significance of it. Therefore, it is said the characteristic of historical cognition (*ninshiki*) is individualization and individual description. . . . What leads that selection and gives historical cognition its direction is *cultural values* (*bunka kachi*).¹²

In other words, history is unified by *values*. On the national level, events that are deeply related with the realization (or failure) of national values are considered historical events. For America, this would include everything from the founding, to the civil war, to the failure of the Vietnam War, to 9/11 and the beginning of the war on terror. I think this can be extrapolated for other levels as well. The history of philosophy focuses on people believed to have realized key contributions to the “spirit” of philosophy. The Catholic

¹¹ Ibid., 15-16. しかし人間の自覚的行動はこの横溢せる現実に対して無為に終わりにはしなかった。過去はいかに豊富であるにもせよ、すでに開示された事実であって、整理統一を許さぬものではない。未来もまた無限に豊富であろうが、しかし当為を原理的に把握することによって、その実現を規制することができる。前者の努力は「歴史」を生み出し、後者の努力は「道」の教えを生み出したのである。

¹² Ibid., 45. 歴史探究の場合には、認識は個別的な現実の理解に向かっている。…ここではそれのもつ個性的なもの、特殊なもの、ただ一回的で繰り返すことのできぬ独自の意義が問題なのである。従って歴史認識の特徴は個性化的、個性記述的であるといわれる。…その選択を導き、歴史認識に方向を与えているのが、文化価値である。

Church focuses on the events that are most tied to its spiritual mission. A family commemorates the events that most clearly define what this family “is about.” Through the unifying lens of these values, what distinguishes one family from another, one community from another, one nation, is brought to the fore.

This also implies that there is nothing “given” about the past:

The past content of *ningen sonzai* is not something that subsists *in itself* regardless of how *ningen* itself grasps it. Only in the grasping of *ningen* itself does it become the content of *ningen sonzai*. Therefore, the development of the way of grasping must simultaneously be the re-making of past content.¹³

And, while Watsuji failed to mention this, the re-grasping of the past is something that can entail a lot of conflict, with people challenging which values should unify the past, resulting in not only a dynamic, but a contested and sometimes fragmented “unity” of history.

However, each family, town, and cultural group has its own “historicity.” For Watsuji, the step from these historicities to “history proper” occurs only via the state. Watsuji writes that the fulcrum for the unification of histories is “none other than *the unity that runs through sittliche organizations*. We have found this unity in the *state* as the *sittliche* organization of *sittliche* organizations. Therefore, the historicity of *ningen sonzai* is manifest in the state.”¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 43. 人間存在の過去的内容は、人間自身がそれをいかに把握するかに関係なく、それ自身において存立しているごときものではない。それはただ人間自身の把握において人間存在の内容となっているのである。従って把握の仕方の展開は同時に過去的内容のつくりかえとならざるを得ない。

¹⁴ Ibid., 16. それは人倫的組織を貫く統一にほかならない。この統一を我々は人倫的組織の人倫的組織としての国家において見いだした。従って人間存在の歴史性は国家においてあらわになってくるのである。

This is perhaps difficult to agree with. Why states, rather than individuals or religions? Watsuji's justification is that the state provides the only way to structure a public sense of the past. For instance, while one can intuitively place days within months, months within seasons, and seasons within a year, what does one place a year within? In a family, this might be placed vis-à-vis someone's age. In a religious community, this is often placed with respect to the birth or death of the founder. But how does one unify all the various histories within overlapping communities in order to form history? For Watsuji, it is the state. By setting a standard for how to count years, the state makes history possible. He supports this further by arguing that it is also the state that makes the recording and transmitting of historical documents possible, allowing for history in a formal sense.

Watsuji's case is admittedly weak. Powerful families can have extraordinarily detailed records going back for generations. The worldwide system for counting years is arguably derived from Christianity—a trans-national religion and not a particular nation-state. And, while the scribe system of a state has a dual use for both promulgating laws and recording history, other organizations can have both laws and historical records (for instance, religious orders).¹⁵ In the end, his argument is almost circular: The possibility for history on the public level of a nation-state is made possible by the organization that unifies it on that level—the nation-state.

Regardless of whether we agree to the centrality of the nation-state, one can still agree with Watsuji that history forms on every level of social organization. Each family, town, academic group, and religion has its own sense of history. Some of these have

¹⁵ His argument that religious histories are still mythical is also easily criticized. Many countries have clearly mythical histories. Is it really possible to separate history and myth?

looser senses of history than others. And all of these histories overlap. *If* there is an attempt to unify all of these levels of social organization (and there can be several competing unifications as well), then this will result in a formal sense of history, which, at least in its modern conception, centers on the nation-state.

What we see above is a thorough intertwining of ethics and a particular history. As a shared sense of past, history shapes ethics and how a particular community ought to proceed. But this very sense of history is itself understood through ethical values, and the events of history themselves are made from the movement of ethics—individuals reaching out to each other, building, responding to, changing, and sometimes breaking trust relationships they have with each other. In other words, *ethics is determined by history, but, at the same time, interprets and shapes history as well.*

2.2 Milieuity and National Existence

Not only is this history specific to particular human organizations, but it is a history of embodied beings in a particular milieu (*fûdo*). One cannot separate one's memories with one's family from the materiality of the home one lived in, the layout of the rooms, the food served, the clothes one was dressed in, the bike shared with one's siblings... In the same way, the regional community is tied to its region, its actual earth. The trees, the nearby stream, the potholed road to the neighboring village, the quality of the soil in the lands tilled—all of these shape the shared consciousness of the people living in that community. Watsuji points out how even the most “spiritual” community of culture is often tied to some sort of land—holy places like the Acropolis or Jerusalem (or more close at hand, the Philosopher's Walk of Nishida Kitarô in the mountains of Kyoto).

This notion of milieu is something that is well-known, thanks to the fame of Watsuji's *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study* (whose original title is *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations*). While this book has often been criticized for "climatic determinism," Augustin Berque has often pointed out in public lectures (and I agree with him entirely) that milieu is not about a determinism or reductionism, but rather about the *essential consideration* of the *trajection* of humankind, of our immediate relationship with our environment, both natural and artificial.

The hot desert sun and the cold nights shape the way people living in such a place eat, the way they dress, the way they build their houses. It also affects the way people relate: The wars fought over watering holes and grazing lands in the desert are quite different from the relations of tribes in rich, monsoon lands. In international relations theories of balance of power, the offense/defense balance is greatly altered by terrain. Thus, in a flat and sandy desert where defense is impossible and offense is very easy, there is a much greater tendency to wage preemptive wars as compared to in mountainous areas or in thick jungles.¹⁶ I think it is a legitimate idea that milieu forms history. And, in turn, human beings form their milieu, their lived environment, from their history—irrigating barren lands, reclaiming land from the sea, and so forth.

This intermingling of milieu and history is what Watsuji calls *national existence*:

One can say that only *ningen sonzai* that is particularly formed milieually has history, and only *ningen sonzai* that historically bears a particular tradition has milieu. Here, we cannot but find in *ningen sonzai*, which has arrived at the formation of the state,

¹⁶ For example, see Charles S. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, "What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It? (Offense, Defense, and International Politics)," *International Security* 22.4 (1998): 44-82.

an extremely individually concretized character of being only now and only here. We call this *national existence* (*kokuminteki sonzai*).¹⁷

With this idea of *national existence*, ethics is emplaced within concrete space and time, milieu and history. It is important to note that this emplacement is not just a gradual broadening from individual temporality (of the self in relation to others) to communal historicity (of families, towns, churches, etc.) to national history. A family can be anywhere, and so can a town (or at least they can be interpreted in that way). But the milieu of a nation-state is clearly tied to an actual territory with specific climatic conditions, flora, and fauna, that are unique. In the same way, the history of a nation-state acquires a fixed position that is unrepeatable, and loses any generic character that the historicity of other organizations may seem to have. Thus, while it is arguable that this applies for all organizations regardless of the presence of the state, it is only through Watsuji's connection of these histories to the history and territory of a state that they become clearly "only now and only here." Thus, acts, truthful responses to trust, virtues—the entire unfolding of ethics is emplaced in the real, the concrete, the unique, and the unrepeatable here-and-now.

3 Universal Morality and National Morals

At this point, one might wonder: By fully affirming the climatic-historical particularity of ethics, has Watsuji not completely ceded to moral relativism? And by centering milieu (as territory) and history (as national history) around the unifying power of the nation-

¹⁷ WTZ11, 192. 風土的に特殊に形成された人間存在のみが歴史を持ち、歴史的に特殊な伝統を担う人間存在が風土を持つ、と云ってよいのである。ここにおいてわれわれは、国家を形成するに至った人間存在が、唯一回的、唯一所的というごとききわめて顕著な個性をもって具体化されていることを、見いださざるを得ない。それをわれわれは国民的存在と名づけるのである。

state, has he not reduced ethics to an even more worrisome theory of national morals (*kokumin dôtoku ron*)? In order to respond to these questions, we need to examine Watsuji's views concerning the discourse on national morals.

The discourse of “national morals” was a heated discourse that began in the Meiji period in response to the influx of Western modernity into Japan and the collision between traditional and modern worldviews.¹⁸ Watsuji's own teacher, Inoue Tetsujirô, was a key figure in this discourse. Watsuji himself was heavily influenced by this discourse, and as we shall soon see, a lot of his own motivations for writing *Ethics* are shared with those “national moralists.” As a result of this influence, Watsuji wrote a considerable number of essays on this topic. The earliest is a lecture on “A Theory of National Morals” (*Kokumin dôtoku ron*) in the 1930s, followed by an essay of the same title in 1932. He authored several entries in the *Encyclopedia of Pedagogy* vol. 2 (*Kyôikugaku jiten*) on nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and national morals (written in 1937), and wrote “Universal Morality and National Morals” (*Fuhenteki dôtoku to kokuminteki dôtoku*, 1938). His continued thoughts on this problem are reflected in a later article entitled “The Problem of National Morals” (*Kokumin dôtoku no mondai*, 1952) that is almost identical with his 1932 essay, thus showing the consistency of his stance.

Let us begin by examining Watsuji's fundamental attitude toward this discourse as seen in the 1932 essay and mirrored in 1952.

3.1 A Critique of National Morals

¹⁸ For more on this topic, see Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010).

Watsuji's stance toward the discourse of national morals is overwhelmingly critical. While he never names names in his critique of the various moralists of that time, he points out what he believes are the failings of their arguments. His criticism can be summarized as follows: The most dangerous mistake of national moralists was their failure to properly differentiate and correlate the historical study of morality from the philosophical/theoretical study of ethics. The historical study of morality ought to study morality as it occurs in the history of Japan or any other nation. However, the study of the ethical principles of national morality is by no means historical but universal, and has to do with the *principles* that govern the ethicality of national existence—the duties of citizens to each other and to the nation-state, and the duties of the nation-state itself. Watsuji sees the national morals discourse as one that tended either to uncritically conflate principles and history or artificially sever them from one another.

For instance, one mistake was to attempt to establish the ought simply through a historical approach—by examining the history of Japan, finding a particular historical age, and raising up its ethos as a universal standard for present Japan. Watsuji finds several problems here. First, how would a purely historical study be able to distinguish between moral ways of life (*dôtoku seikatsu*) and immoral (*hidôtoku*) ones?¹⁹ Furthermore, there are many ages and many ways of life in a people: Which one should be held up as a standard for all? In order to make these distinctions, one needs to sneak in an ethical standard into a supposedly objective historical study. Thus, there is a methodological issue here.

¹⁹ WTZ23, 94.

Furthermore, there is an essential misunderstanding here that the morality of a nation is unified and unchanging. Watsuji writes:

The assertion that the particular ethos of an age should, as it is, apply to other periods as well is a failure to understand what constitutes historical development. Even if one says that in a given period in Japan a particular national morality was formed, it is not necessarily the case that it will have any power as an ought for Japanese in other periods.²⁰

Historical moralities are not static—they change with circumstances and with the transformation of social relationships. As such, even if a particular ethos held sway in the medieval period, it does not necessarily still apply in modernity.

However, another mistake was in seeing historical moralities as completely relative across nations (and extending that, perhaps even across historical periods). Watsuji rejects the argument that a particular national morality might hold for Japan alone and be irrelevant for anyone else (or a German morality for Germans alone, and so on). He argues that, while nations are particular (as we have seen him argue repeatedly in *Ethics II* and *III*), the structural moment of national existence (*kokuminteki sonzai*) is not:

Ningen sonzai has various stages, and those stages are stipulated by the way bonds are formed between people. That is universal in *ningen sonzai*. Existence as a nation/citizen (*kokumin*) is common for all peoples (*minzoku*) that have arrived at state-formation, and is not particular.²¹

Furthermore, Watsuji argues that no morality can ever have any sense of legitimacy if it is *merely* particular. He says that every morality—even the National Learning

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95. 一つの時代の特殊な *ēthos* がそのまま他の時代にも通用せねばならぬと出張するときは、歴史的発展の何たるかを解しないのである。日本においてある一定の時代にある特殊な国民道徳が形成せられたとしても、それが他の時代の日本人にも当為としての力を持つとは限らない。

²¹ *Ibid.*, 387. 人間存在には様々な段階があり、その段階は人々の間の結合の仕方によって規定されている。それは人間存在にとって普遍的である。国民としての存在もまた、国家を形成するに至った民族にとっては、すべて共通であって、特殊的ではない。

movement (*kokugaku*)—derives its authority from an appeal to a sense of universality—that *human beings* (and not just a particular nation) *ought to be as such*.

So, on one hand, we see that one must not universalize the particular—for instance, by force-fitting a past morality onto the present, or by extension, one nation’s morality unto another. While the national moralists were aware of the particularity of nations, the particularity of historical periods was often forgotten. But, on the other hand, one must not sever the particular from the universal. For Watsuji, a national morality, even though it is necessarily particular to a concrete climatic-historical spiritual totality, loses its force as a morality the instant it is severed from universal principles. This is something that national moralists completely missed in their focus on historical methods and their reduction of the philosophical study of principles to mere analysis of history (or outright rejection of ethics).

Watsuji understands the relationship between the universal and the particular in the following way: “The universal shows itself only in the particular, and the particular is only the particular as a realization of the universal.”²² On one hand, this demonstrates the interdependence of universality and particularity. But, while it may seem that universality and particularity have equal footing here, in a sense, universality seems to receive more emphasis than the latter. Only through an understanding of what the nation is and what morality is can one begin to proceed with any historical study of morality. (Watsuji sees his *Ethics* as a response to these basic questions of the nature of nation and morality, and his later *The History of Japanese Ethical Thought* as the historical study that proceeds

²² Ibid., 95. 普遍は特殊においてのみおのれを現し、特殊は普遍の実現としてのみ特殊である。

from this—a study of how universal ethics is concretized in the history of a nation.) Furthermore, every particular national morality aims at the universal principle of how national existence ought to be. While *all* expressions of ethics are particular, they are judged on the basis of their fidelity to the universal ought.

Watsuji is not completely casting out the tradition of national morals with this shift to a focus on principles. He points out that the motivations of this movement—creating a sense of self-awareness amongst the Japanese people, resisting the bourgeois spirit with its liberalism and individualism (as is often found in Western discourses on ethics), and revering the emperor as the expression of national totality—are all noble tasks. However, he argues that the tragedy of the movement was in hitching the creation of national self-awareness to a feudal and anachronistic conservatism, thus losing its capacity to dynamically resist the bourgeois spirit or revere the emperor in a genuine way.²³ In response to this, Watsuji takes up the original task of national morals but goes about it in a more critical and less reactionary way—by seeking out the universal principles that govern *ningen sonzai* as *kokuminteki sonzai*, that are given the particularity of milieu and history, expressed as concrete duties placed on individual citizens (*kokumin*), toward each other and toward the nation (*kokumin*), as well as demands placed on the nation as a whole, vis-à-vis its citizens and other nations. This is a clear refusal of a “moral relativism” completely divorced from ethical principles, and instead, acknowledges the differences in morality found by history and anthropology.

3.2 A Critique of Universal Morality

²³ Ibid., 98-99.

This shows Watsuji's commitment to universal, systematic ethics. Needless to say, Watsuji's systematic works from *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* to *Ethics I-III*, are *not* a theory of "Japanese morality" as opposed to "western individualism" as the western reception of Watsuji sometimes sees it. In the foreword to *Ethics*, we see that Watsuji at the very least *aims for* a universal ethics in this work —just like Aristotle's, Hegel's, or Kant's.²⁴ (We will discuss later whether or not it arrives at this aim.) Thus, the analysis of *ningen sonzai*, despite the particularity of the Japanese words that express it, is meant to apply to all peoples. This is supported by Watsuji's constant reference to universal ethicists like Kant in each volume of *Ethics*. But, most decisively, Watsuji attempts a "comparative ethics" in *Ethics I*, where he tries to show the fundamental unity of the commandments of Christianity and the precepts of Buddhism, in order to demonstrate that trust relationships surrounding life, property, sexual relations, and communication universally call for truthfulness, despite the variation in the *form* of these trust relationships (as to what might constitute murder, theft, deceit, etc.).²⁵ He concludes as follows:

The view that the standard of goodness and badness differs in accordance with time and place is obviously false. What differs here has something to do with the extent and the trust relationship and the manner of its expression, not with the principle according to which a response to trust is good and a betrayal of trust is bad. This principle has not been subject to any change throughout all societies, ranging from the most primitive to the most civilized.²⁶

However, let not the above give the impression that Watsuji was a rational, moral universalist like the philosophers of the enlightenment. If we examine his 1937 article on "Universal Morality and National Morals," we find a critical genealogy of the idea of

²⁴ *WTZ10*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 303-308 (287-291).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 308 (291).

universal morality. This gives us a strong indication as to what Watsuji's national ethics is *not*, as well as what it aims to be.

In this article, Watsuji is still focused on the relationship between universal and national morality, but from a slightly different angle. Here, his concern is not the clash between Japanese morals and theoretical ethics, but between the cosmopolitan idea of morality and any morality that might respect finite, concrete totalities. He will thus try to show how a proper understanding of the relationship between finite totalities and infinite or absolute totality might dissolve the seeming conflict of universal and national morality.

According to Watsuji, the reason why universal and national morality clash is because, historically, finite totality and infinite totality were realized separately, thus impeding the realization of their relationship. He points out that, in primitive civilizations (as seen by Emile Durkheim's studies on totem and taboo in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*), totality is experienced through the finite totality—where the great power of the community is seen as divine. He writes:

It is now generally accepted that the object of their religious worship was, in truth, none other than the *totality of ningen* as a clan (*shizoku*), or the totality of *ningen as a tribe* (*buzoku*) or *as a nation* (*kokumin*). The god of the *Old Testament* was originally a *tribal god*, and later became *the god of a nation*.²⁷

Similarly, in ancient Greece, the individual was situated within the finite totality of the polis. In these arrangements, the individual person acquires a sense of significance in relation to a palpable, historico-climatically particular whole. One might surmise that any morality in such a world would be “political,” that is, between the concrete individual and the concrete whole, rather than any abstract sense of humanity.

²⁷ WTZ23, 163. それらの宗教的礼拝の対象が、実は氏族としての人間の全体性、あるいは部族としての、更には国民としての人間の全体性にほかならなかったことは、今や一般に承認せらるるところである。『旧約聖書』の神は本来部族神であり、後に国民的な神となった。

However, with the rise of the age of empires, these lived totalities were replaced by large trans-national states. In comparison to the tribe or polis, these must have been absolutely unnavigable for individuals, making it very difficult for one to find meaning as a person in a political way—that is, through participation in a finite community. This created a shift in the view of man as situated within a living totality to a “cosmopolitan” view of man:

The human being that first finds himself as an individual within a polis was always an individual as a member and not an independent individual. However, as the national totality was destroyed, the individual founded within that became an individual sans totality. The striking *individualist* thought at the end of Ancient Greece is rooted in this. Such an independent individual discovers himself as a member of a global state (*sekai kokka*), a *kosmo-politēs*. Therefore, the totality of people of this global state was grasped as none other than a collection of independent individuals.²⁸

Thus, Watsuji reads the cosmopolitan order as an uprooting of the member from his/her lived totality. The resulting notion of “humanity” is thus not a lived totality but merely an abstract generality that includes these monadic individuals within itself.²⁹

The birth of “universal morality” as it is often conceived of was within this cosmopolitan matrix, particularly within Christianity. Watsuji sees Christianity as a cosmopolitan religion (as opposed to the “national” religion of Judaism) that sought to bypass all the individual’s memberships in various totalities (family, class, nation) and unify all

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 164. 初めポリスの全体性において個人として見出された人間は、あくまでも国民の一員としての個人であって独立した個人ではなかった。しかるに国民的全体性が破壊せられるとともに、その地盤における個人は全体性なき個人となった。ギリシアの末期に著しい個人主義的思想は右の如き背景に基づくのである。かかる独立せる個人が、人工に作られた世界国家の一員、即ち *kosmo-politēs* として己れを見いだすのである。だからこの世界国家の人民の全体は、独立せる個人の総計として把握せられるほかなかったのである。

²⁹ His reading also shows Watsuji’s preference for a “republican model of citizenship” or citizenship-as-activity similar to Aristotle’s, rather than a liberal model of citizenship or citizenship-as-status. This lends substance to the previous critique of liberalism, which continues here.

See Patricia J. Campbell, Aran MacKinnon, Christy R. Stevens, *An Introduction to Global Studies* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 23-24.

individuals directly before god. Even with the rise of humanism, which sought to challenge the dominance of the church and theocentrism by replacing it with humanity (De *Menschheit*), the primary configuration of equal individuals before absolute totality remained unquestioned. The result of this genealogy from the age of empires to the Renaissance is a long forgetfulness of the *moral* value of community in the period between Aristotle and Hegel. Thus, we find an overwhelming focus on “universal” morality, whose discourse tends to exclude the possibility of legitimate yet particular forms of “national morals.”³⁰

However, Watsuji finds this approach largely problematic. First, can we really ignore all the other groups that an individual is part of? An ethical view that ignores one’s family relations, profession, relationships with one’s neighbors, country—does this not become abstract to the point of irrelevance? Second, does this abstractness not result in *hypocrisy* on the part of universal moralists, in that they might intone an “equality of all men before God” but at the same time be completely incapable of recognizing the personhood of blacks, of Indians, and of Chinese?³¹ As Watsuji has discussed in *Ethics II*, there are limits to our capacity to recognize the very personhood of those who lie outside our cultural sphere. Thus, equating our cultural view of human beings to a “universal”

³⁰ This connection between universal morality, individualism, and Christianity was quite perceptive. The political philosopher Ian Shapiro would similarly argue that one of the key marks of enlightenment political theory is the “workmanship ideal.” This begins with John Locke, who argues that rights uphold the fact that we own what we create—an ideal taken from theology, god’s ownership over his creation, and man’s ability to participate in creation. Thus, the political defense of individual rights is strongly rooted in Christianity, although it is generally thought to be purely secular.

See Ian Shapiro, *The Moral Foundations of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 14-15.

³¹ WTZ23, 171-173.

view of humankind can often result in the violence of simply excluding “barbarians” and “heretics” from the very scope of the human.³²

It is clear that, while Watsuji sees the historical study of morality as rooted in the universal principles of ethics, his idea of “universal morality” is not to be equated with the cosmopolitan, individualist view of morality, and his idea of “national morals” is not to be equated with the one that “universal morality” rejects.

First, Watsuji has a completely different view of infinite totality. Rather than infinite totality in the cosmopolitan sense—one that directly links all individuals in an equal manner—Watsuji sees infinite totality as *absolute totality*, where all individuality is *extinguished*. According to Watsuji, this view is not possible in a religion where the individual has an eternal soul, but is only possible in a religion which is grounded in a view of no-self. He is thus suggesting a fundamental *political* difference between Buddhism and Christianity.

Watsuji points out how, in transcending the caste differences in Indian society, Buddhism did not merely become trans-class or trans-national, but became trans-species:

Absolute totality is the totality not merely of *ningen* but of all life, all existence. This is why it was grasped not as “humanity” but as “sentient beings” (*shujō*). . . . In such a standpoint, assertions such as that “individual beings are equal before absolute totality” become completely meaningless. Here we find a great difference between religions that center on *the demand for an immortal soul* and religions of *no-self* (*muga*). . . . Equality is *non-discrimination*, and therefore must be the *extinguishing* (*shōmetsu*) of the individual. Absolute totality requires an equality and non-discrimination *sans individuals*, an absolute *non-duality of self and other* (*jita funi*).³³

³² This is something that resonates with the recent critiques by Giorgio Agamben on our treatment of the marginal other. But Watsuji’s response is not to see ways of including the other, but of allowing the other to belong within his/her respective national totality.

³³ *Ibid.*, 169-170. 絶対的全体性は人間のみならず一切の生の、一切の存在の、全体性である。だからそこでは「人間」ではなくして「衆生」が把握せられた。…かかる立場においては人間の「個人」が絶対的全体性の前において平等であるという如き主張は何の意味も持たない。ここに靈魂不死の要求を中心とする宗教と無我の宗教との大いなる差別が見られる。…平

Given this different approach to absolute totality, the need to obviate finite totalities like the family, the region, or the state—which Watsuji faults cosmopolitan views with—is overcome. Rather, finite totalities are affirmed as the *only way* for non-duality to be realized. Watsuji finds particular value in Mahāyāna Buddhism, writing:

One of the best characteristics of Mahāyāna Buddhism is the recognition that the life communities (*seikatsu kyôdôtai*) from the family to the national whole can be tantamount to, as they are, the realization of absolute totality. . . . Seen this way, finite human totality is established within infinite totality—“emptiness”—and as the inevitable path of the self-manifestation of [infinite] totality, [finite totality] acquires a most fundamental significance. It is, as the realization of the non-discriminateness of *ningen*, that is, as the concrete realization of “emptiness,” the highest morality. . . . We can say that according to Buddhism, the realization of universal morality is, in its highest scale, only realized through the totality as nation.³⁴

What we see here is a view of absolute totality that can only be realized in finite totalities. Therefore, rather than rejecting national morals, a view of universal morality is something that can only be realized through national morals—and analogously, all the other moral codes that regulate the expression of non-duality within various finite totalities, from the family to the state. (This clarifies Watsuji’s position in *Ethics II*, showing how relationality is necessarily through finite totalities, and how emptiness might manifest in each level of human organization.) This shift in understanding of finite and infinite totalities and their relationship to each other allows Watsuji to dissolve the conflict between national and universal morality.

等は無差別であり従って個人の消滅でなければならぬ。絶対的全体性においては個人なき平等無差別、絶対的なる自他不二があるのみである。

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-171. 大乘仏教の優れた特徴の一つは、家族より初めて国民全体に至るまでの生活共同体が、そのまま絶対的全体性の実現たり得ることの承認であった。…かく見れば有限なる人間の全体性は、無限なる全体性すなわち「空」において成立し、この全体性が己を現す必然的な道として、もっとも根源的な意義を獲得する。それは人間の無差別の実現として、即ち「空」の具体的な実現として、最高の道徳である。…仏教による普遍的道徳の実現が、その最大のスケールにおいてただ国民としての全体性においてのみ実現せられたということを、われわれは安んじていい得るのである。

However, as I hope is clear, the harmony of national and universal morality requires a *particular notion* of each kind of morality. Universal morality must not be a cosmopolitan morality that governs the relationship between the individual and the whole. Rather, it ought to be a morality of absolute emptiness that is expressed in any relationship where closed individuality is overcome. Similarly, national moralities that either exclude any relationship with greater wholes or that protect only the individual (and thus do not foster the expression of emptiness on various levels of finite totality) cannot be accepted within this scheme. This excludes racism and national egoism. But this also rejects utilitarianism and liberal capitalism as *fundamentally flawed and against finite totalities* and thus not even fit of the title “morality.”³⁵

Recapitulation

As we have seen in Watsuji’s articles on the discourse of national morality, Watsuji is *not* conceding to some “anything-goes” moral relativism. Rather, the morality that is formed by history and that lenses history’s self-understanding is a national morality in a very specific sense. It is a morality that is, on one hand, historico-climatically specific, and unifies the ethical life of a finite, lived totality. Thus, it is not only particular to a nation, but also to a particular historical period, and cannot be forcibly applied to other nations and other historical periods.

But, on the other hand, various national morals are grounded in and expressive of universal morality. This is why even the historical study of moralities requires the study of principles in order for moralities to even be recognizable as such. But again, universal

³⁵ Ibid., 174-176.

morality here is meant in a specific sense—not as a cosmopolitan morality governing all individuals equally as autonomous agents, but as a morality of selflessness through truthful response to trust relationships, which radically relativizes all forms of discriminateness in the face of absolute non-discriminateness. It is only through this universal morality as the realization (*jikaku*) of emptiness that all forms of finite totality—and the specific moralities that realize them—can have genuine worth.

This reassessment of the concepts of national and universal morality and their relation to each other can be seen as attempting to address two core issues. First, it attempts to resist the imperialist tendencies of universalism. By accepting that finite totalities are historically and climatically particular, and that an embodied ethics must be particular as well, it prevents the imperialist imposition of one culture's moral standards on others. Second, while maintaining the respect for cultural difference, it avoids disinvolved relativism, wherein it becomes impossible for any nation to positively participate in the moral affairs of another. Despite cultural difference, emptiness forms a trans-cultural “principle” upon which nations can judge their own culture as well as that of others.

However, does Watsuji fully overcome the problems he sets to here? How universal is his *Rinrigaku*? We will return to these problems later.

4 World History

The emplacement of finite totalities within the infinite totality necessarily places individual national histories in relation to each other, bringing us to the level of the global, of world history. What is the story of this level of history, and how does it unfold? Let us return to *Ethics III* to examine these questions.

In Watsuji's discussion of history, despite his assertion of its particularity to a particular people, there is a key point that breaks open this seemingly hermetically sealed view of culture: The self-awareness of history—of *any* history—is only possible in relation to its *other*. He writes,

History is revealed in the trans-state (*chô kokkateki*) stage. The state's self-consciousness (*jikaku*) is mediated by other states. Thus, the self-consciousness of history occurs when the people (*minzoku*) that composes this state comes into contact with other peoples and experiences various forms of excitement and peril.³⁶

For instance, Watsuji points out that the first history of the world was written by Herodotus only with the clash between Persia and Greece. After all, how would one realize what is Greek, if one is never confronted with what is *not* Greek? Similarly, Japan's self-awareness was also made possible in its relationship with China and Korea. Until today, national self-awareness is always in relation to other nations.

This is a carryover from his logic of mediated relationships, which I have discussed in my analysis of *Ethics II*. A finite totality is mediated by tangible things (material, historical factors) that both unite those within it and exclude those outside of it. The “privacy” of each totality is an essential moment of its formation. But without any contact with that which is outside of this private domain—without the tension between the public and the private—the notion of the “we” cannot form. Analogously, a nation's history is always in relation to other nations and their histories.

However, this relationship with others is not just an oppositional relationship. In *Ethics III*, Watsuji repeats many of his ideas from his previous responses to the national morals discourse, but this time with a keen eye to the events that had just swept Japan—

³⁶ WTZ11, 34. 歴史は超国家的な場面において現われてくる。国家の自覚は他の国家を媒介とするように、歴史の自覚は国家を形成せる民族が他の民族との接触してさまざまの興奮や危険を経験する際に起こるのである。

the entry into, and ultimately defeat in the Pacific theater of World War II. Perhaps part of the fruits of this national tragedy is Watsuji's realization that realizing national morality (or as he now calls it, the national imperative, *kokumin no tōi*) as a concretization of universal morality demands first, a *continuous self-overcoming* of national morality, and second, a participation of national morality in the theater of international responsibility.

Because the historical and particular are rooted in the eternal and universal, history can never rest completed. Rather, culture and values all need to be constantly renewed. What does this require?

For that, first, the proper cognition of their nation's individuality (*kosei*) needs to be realized amongst the mass of citizens. . . . Furthermore, from within this cognition, the strong demand to overcome the limits (*gentei*) contained within this national individuality must arise. These matters may require awaiting strong, prophetic figures (*yogenshateki jinbutsu*) for their occurrence. If the demand of the mass of citizens rises up, then perhaps eventually this will call forth a genius (*tensaiteki na jinbutsu*) who can create culture anew.³⁷

Realizing one's culture, its limits, and a new way to overcome these—all of these factors require the relationship with other nations. For not only is it in encountering other nations that a nation becomes self-aware, but it is also in seeing how things might have gone otherwise that we see limitations in our own social structures and find inspiration to do things otherwise. Watsuji raises the example of Gaugin in Tahiti,³⁸ but many more examples of inter-cultural learning abound—from the adoption of Arabic numerals to the rise

³⁷ Ibid., 195. そのためにはまず国民大衆の間に、この国民の個性の正しい認識を実現しなくてはならない。…さらにこの認識のなかから国民的個性に含まれた限定を超克しようとする強い要求を湧き立たせなくてはならない。これらのことはただ力強い預言者の人物を待ってのみ起こることかもしれぬ。国民大衆の要求が湧き立ってくれば、やがて新しい文化の創造をなしうるような天才的な人物が呼び出されてくるであろう。

³⁸ Ibid., 348.

of the socialist states to the transmission of Buddhism to the west. In all these, a nation finds itself not merely as opposed to other nations, but as part of a community of nations.

However, while learning from other countries is crucial, Watsuji also stresses the respect for other nations—respecting that their national morals are their own ways of realizing the universal. Thus, changes to a culture have to be spontaneous and internal, rather than imposed: “If this is coerced using military force, the nation thus coerced will probably become *without personality* (*museikakuteki*) and *spineless* (*sebone naki*).”³⁹ It is likely he is directing these comments at the occupying American forces—but it is also possible he is taking a jab at his own nation’s colonial activities, which he had opposed.

With this gradual process of cultural and ethical interlinking between nations, the sense of a single international community began to grow. Watsuji points out that a watershed here was the crusades: as war broke out all across the continent, a genuine sense of world history arose. The story no longer belonged to one nation, but became an interweaving of the stories of all. With this unified sense of world history, history itself could become self-aware—and Watsuji sees this as evidenced by the rise of philosophy of history, in people like Vico and Herder.⁴⁰

With this sense of self-awareness of history, an *ideal* of one world (*hitotsu no sekai*), one humankind began to emerge. Allow me to repeat the quotation here:

The *ideal* finally arose in history that we should form humankind into *one community* with no divisions of nation or state, and in so doing realize the law of *ningen sonzai* at the level of humankind (*jinruiteki ni*). This is the *ideal of the unity of humankind*.

³⁹ Ibid., 197. もしそれを武力によって強制するというふうなことをやれば、強制された国民はおそらく無性格的な、背骨なきものとなるであろう。

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41. Watsuji’s choice of Vico and Herder shows his own inclinations, too. In Watsuji’s book introducing these two thinkers entitled *The Pioneers of Modern Philosophy of History* (*Kindai rekishi tetsugaku no senkusha*, see WTZ6) he stresses that, unlike Hegel, *all nations* are participants in world history for these thinkers. The story of all is not the monopoly of any organization (like the church), any nation, or even any continent.

In this ideal, humankind can be said to have become *self-conscious* of its essence, that is, that the same law of *ningen sonzai* makes humankind into what it is.⁴¹

I think that this model can be connected to the discourse on morality as well: The realization that all national morals realize universal morality leads to the realization that all humankind is one in the *essential core* of morality. Realizing this universality in a keen awareness of our inter-national humanity thus shows the possibility for humankind to be a unified community.

However, note that Watsuji refers to the one world as an “ideal” and not a fact. For the fact of humankind is hardly a unity:

When *ningen* began its historic self-realization, *the unity of humankind (jinrui no tōitsu) did not exist*, and all there was was conflict and war. After that, humankind’s history was still a history of conflict and war. Humankind attaining one *socioethical (jinrinteki) unity*, in other words, humankind forming a *living totality* has never occurred. Therefore, humankind is, factually speaking, none other than *the space for conflict and war* between all states and all nations.⁴²

But it is amidst this conflict that the realization of the one world becomes possible. And in an attempt to realize this ideal of unity in actuality, many trans-national empires have formed through violent conquest. However, for Watsuji, this sort of imperialism is not progress toward the unity of humankind: “Rather, it oppresses the *characteristic individuality (dokuji na kosei)* of each nation and state, making it submit to an external power.

⁴¹ Ibid., 68. 人類が民族や国家の別なく一つの共同体を形成し、それによって人間存在の理法を人類的に実現すべきであるという理念が、歴史的に生み出されるに至った。これが人類の統一の理念である。この理念において人類はおのれの本質を、すなわち同じ人間存在の理法が人類を人類たらしめていることを、自覚したのであると云ってよいであろう。

⁴² Ibid. 人間がおのれを歴史的に自覚しはじめたときには、人類の統一は存せず、ただ対立と争闘とのみがあったのである。その後の人類の歴史もまた対立と争闘との歴史であって、人類が一つの人倫的統一に達したことは、すなわち生きた全体を形成したことは、一度もない。従って人類は、事実的には、諸国家諸国民の対立と争闘の場にほかならない。

Thus, as the destruction of freedom, it can even be said to be a step backward.”⁴³ As such, empires are resisted and fall—showing that the very loss of the unity of the empire is somehow progress for the unity of humankind.

At the risk of being repetitive, it is important to point out that in his systematic ethics, Watsuji consistently rejected imperialism and wars of aggression. In the previous chapter, we saw that even in the wartime version of *Ethics II*, he criticized invasion as destroying the living totality of a nation, lambasted the aggressions committed by colonists, and argued that the only purpose of war is to *defend* the moral totality of a nation. These support the two points we have just raised from *Ethics III* that argue for the need to respect the cultural and political autonomy of nation-states.

What we are beginning to see here is a view similar to his notion of absolute totality and universal morality:

The true unity of humankind ought to be a unity wherein the included nations and states would no longer *desire liberation*, that is, each nation and state’s *individuality is sufficiently respected*, and without oppressing such, completely fulfills (*jôju*) the proper mission (*dokuji no shimei*) of each. . . . The ideal of the unity of humankind would definitely break through an *abstract unity*, a *homogenous* unity where individuality is discarded.⁴⁴

Just like his definition of absolute totality in *Ethics I*, the true unity of humankind is not a unity without difference, but a unity that includes difference. It must be an emptiness that is a non-discrimination that includes discrimination. Thus, the unity that he sees at

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 71. むしろそれぞれの民族や国家の独自の個性を抑圧し、それを外的な力に服従せしめるがゆえに、自由の破壊として退歩であるとさえもいえるであろう。

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72. 真の人類の統一は、そこに包含せられた民族や国家がもはや解放の要求を持たなくてすむような統一、即ちそれぞれの民族や国家の個性を十分に尊重し、それに抑圧を加えることなく、その独自の使命をあますところなく成就せしめるような統一でなくてはならない。…個性を没却した一様化としての統一、すなわち抽象的統一は、人類の統一の理念によって突き崩されるものにほかならないのである。

the end of history is not an abstract unity but a *unity-in-difference*. And, through the missteps of empires and fractured but individual nation-states, we try to search for a way to realize this ideal in actuality.

With this, Watsuji sees a large movement pulling together all history. He sees pre-historical human beings as largely homogenous, expressing the unity of *ningen sonzai*.⁴⁵ However, people began to differentiate markedly with the rise of civilization. But Watsuji sees these differences developmentally:

With diligent research, one will come to understand that these differentiated things are, in actuality, part of the same developmental stages, standing upon shared principles. Historical development is none other than a *movement of particularization* in accordance with each territory (*kokudo*).⁴⁶

With this rise of difference, there was a loss of the primordial unity of humankind, and there grew a sense of otherness between peoples. However, it is through this difference that it becomes possible for nations to be self-aware. In this self-awareness, it, at the same time, becomes possible to re-discover unity amongst humankind.

Here we have the original movement of double-negation from *Ethics I* writ large—from one undifferentiated totality of humankind, to many individuated nations, and then back to recovering a sense of unity-in-difference. What we see here is a movement—an ought governing the movement of all nations in history, of all histories in History. It is none other than an *ethics of history*, which Watsuji encourages each nation to realize. Of course, this is couched in the heavily Hegelian terminology of Watsuji's time. In contemporary language, what Watsuji is suggesting is none other than *global ethics*,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁶ Ibid. そういう異なったものが、実は同じ発展段階に属し、共通の原理の上に立っている、というごときは丹念な研究の後にはじめてわかってくることなのである。歴史的展開は、それぞれの国土に従って特殊化する動きにほかならない。

both in the sense of normative international relations theory and in the more far-reaching sense of an ethics that permeates every society, from the individual to the global whole.

5 Realizing Global Ethics

Examining the above, we see that world history is fundamentally intertwined with ethics. Both national and universal morality intertwine to form every part of history—with national values forming and formed by the movements of national history; constantly striving to realize absolute totality (that is universal) through finite communities; coming into self-awareness in relationship with other communities; and, with them, inter-nationally, trying to realize absolute totality on a global scale. This is Watsuji's *Ethics of History*, his global ethics, *in theory*. However, how does it work with Watsuji's concrete suggestions? Let us examine Watsuji's view of the intra-national and the inter-national imperatives.

5.1 Intra-national Imperative

First, Watsuji suggests that, before one can try to realize one world, each nation must first realize its own *sittliche* unity. This follows from his previous discussion on national morals: National morals are important in that they allow universal morality—the elimination of self or ego—on each level of human connectivity. Thus, as Watsuji discusses in *Ethics II*, the state has the duty of giving each citizen his/her place, giving each level of society (families, towns, economic groups, churches, schools, etc.) their own place, and safeguarding the ability of all groups to be venues for the self-transcendence of the individual.

The content of this national morality is, of course, specific, and depends on the milieu, the degree of civilization, differences in social structure, historical factors, and so on. All of these spatio-temporal factors shape the kind of trust relations that a state aims

to protect. However, they derive their authority from the universal demand to realize the nation as a *Sittlichkeit*.⁴⁷

However, given this clear normative demand—to create unity within a nation through the various levels of community membership—all national moralities are in some way deficient. And, in the contact between nations, it is possible for a nation to learn from another. Watsuji stresses the importance of this:

Thinking of it in this way, the *realization of moral difference* in each nation is indispensable for the fulfillment of the universal socio-ethical path (*jinrin no michi*). It saves each nation from *conceit (unubore)* and spurs them to work to overcome their *individual limitations (seigen)*.⁴⁸

These are therefore the intra-national components of the ethics of history—building ethical unity in the nation, realizing its own character, and overcoming the nation’s character and limits through the encounter with other nations. Watsuji has an interesting assertion here—it is the nations that best realize their individuality and develop their own national *sittliche* unity that are best able to realize the trans-national unity of all humankind: “In national existence thus particularized, it is rather that the universal principle of *ningen sonzai* is realized (*jikaku*) more strongly. The drive to unify the world appears most strongly in the most uniquely developed (*dokuji na hatten o togeta*) nations.”⁴⁹ Is this just a platitude to assert the need for nationalism? Or might this be linked to how in *Ethics I*, it is the descent of the individual into what is most individual that brings him/her

⁴⁷ Ibid., 347-348.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 348. かく考えればそれぞれの国民における道德の相違の自覚は、普遍的な人倫の道の実現の上に欠くべからざるものである。それはそれぞれの国民をうぬぼれから救い、その個性的制限を超克すべき努力に駆り立てて行く。

⁴⁹ Ibid., 202. そのように特殊化した国民的存在において、かえって強く、人間存在の普遍的な原理が自覚されてくるのである。世界を一つにしようという努力が最も力強く現われてくるのも、最も独自の発展を遂げた国民においてなのである。

into a total dissolution of self before absolute emptiness? Watsuji seems to consistently suggest an ascent to higher levels of relatedness that paradoxically occurs through a descent into bottomless self.

5.2 International Imperative

On the foundation of ethically unified nations where citizens are able to realize their selflessness in participating in the nation-state as a living totality, it becomes possible to build Watsuji's vision of international society.

The first aspect of this international community is political. Watsuji points out that history teaches us that military might cannot unify the world. Rather, imperialism impoverishes the richness of culture through its domineering practices. "The 'One World', as the *sittliche organization between all nations*, ought to be formed not by military might, but by reason (*dôri*)."⁵⁰ It is important that the word he uses here—*dôri*—is not the ordinary word for reason. It uses two characters both used to express the Greek *logos*: the way (*michi*) and reason (*kotowari*). It is not a word Watsuji uses often, and may have strong religious implications. For instance, in Buddhism it means "the law of all existence," or "the way that ought to be protected as *ningen*."⁵¹

However, Watsuji does not think that this rational-ethical unity of nations can be a "world democracy." He points out how the size of a state requires that it have divisions (into prefectures or regions)—how could we possibly unify the whole world without states? He also points out the impossibility of forming a global public sphere without a

⁵⁰ Ibid., 401. 「一つの世界」は、諸国民の間の人倫的組織として、武力によらず道理によって、形成されなくてはならぬ。

⁵¹ Ishida Mizumaro, *Reibun Bukkyôgo daijitten* (Tokyo: Shôgakukan, 1997), 802.

world transportation and communication system. (Clearly Watsuji did not write in the age of Google and global warming—we will return to this problem shortly.) If not a global democracy, what then might this “global state” (*sekaiteki kokka*) be?

Watsuji suggests that the answer might be in international organizations like the League of Nations and the United Nations. But he suggests that, in something like the UN, national sovereignty has to be surrendered to a certain extent—there cannot be an effective international order if the only way to influence nations is through military force. This would require the empowerment of the UN by the nations, giving it a sovereignty that arises from the general will of the nations. However, he does not see this as a complete ceding of national sovereignty, but as a “sharing” of sovereignty between the national and international level.

The second aspect of this international order is economic. Watsuji points out how economic relations have played a central role in the self-awareness of history. However, he warns that economic linkage is often blind and profit-centered, an unregulated competition for often exploitative ventures. This, of course, resulted in the colonial period which exploded with the great wars. If Watsuji were alive today, he would see that this economic set-up still remains in many ways.

Rather than this exploitative free-for-all between nations, Watsuji suggests a “*rational and self-aware*”⁵² world economy. In what seems to me to be a global socialism, each nation contributes products in accordance to the particularities of its milieu. This

⁵² WTZ11, 403.

inter-national division of labor will hopefully create interdependence and an overall improvement in economic conditions—a global system of mutual service.⁵³ In “Universal Morality and National Morals,” Watsuji had mentioned that “Strictly speaking, one can assert that national morals is originally the realization of universal morality and is both inwardly socialist morality (*shakaishugiteki dôtoku*) and outwardly internationalist (*kokusaishugiteki*) morality.”⁵⁴ Perhaps in *Ethics III* we can say that the ethics of history is socialist in *both* national and international levels.

The third aspect of this order, and perhaps the trickiest, is cultural. Watsuji warns us that the history of the empires shows us that cultural homogeneity is a mistake that impoverishes humankind and goes against the specificity of milieu and history. Imagine if the Inuit were as soft and gentle as many pacific islanders—they would die out in the harsh Arctic climates.

However, I think by *Ethics III*, Watsuji is at least beginning to realize that even the universal level of morality and ethical life requires *embodiment* and *mediation*. If nations do not share in a global culture of shared meanings in any way, global politics and economics will be impossible. Thus, Watsuji suggests that it is possible for a global culture to form, not as a replacement of national culture, but as a layer on top of it that is formed in a transformative and uncoerced manner.

Watsuji’s suggestion as to where this global culture should come from is shocking: He writes, “Is it not the case that a ‘One World’ will be created in the 20th century in

⁵³ See Watsuji’s view of economics in *Ethics II*, discussed in Chapter I.

⁵⁴ WTZ23, 176. 厳密な意味における国民的道德が本来普遍的道德の実現であるとともに、内に向かっては社会主義的道德であり、外に向かっては国際主義的道德であることを主張し得るのである。

which people will speak English, Christianity will be the main religion, and an American worldview will be dominant? This is not a homogenization by power. Rather, it is a homogenization that arises naturally from a superior culture (*yûshû na bunka*).⁵⁵ There are two reasons why I think this is preposterous. First, Watsuji had a general disdain toward American culture, which can be seen in his 1944 book *The Way of the Japanese Subject and America's National Character*. But more than that, Watsuji's primary issue with America and Christianity was the tendency towards utilitarianism, individualism, and a cosmopolitan view that obviates finite totalities. My hypothesis is that this statement is a result of pandering to occupation forces—or perhaps, it is an inside joke, one that anyone who had been following Watsuji's argument would quickly understand. I think the question of where global culture should come from remains an open question at this point.

Thus, we see the *telos* of Watsuji's ethics of history—a self-aware and dynamic ethical unity of nations that founds an international political, economic, and cultural unity-in-difference where each nation is able to participate in this whole precisely as the particular historico-milieu nation that it is.

6 Contemporary Analysis: Moral Relativism and Cosmopolitanism

In this chapter, I have tried to present Watsuji's ethics as expanding to a *global ethics*. How might we situate Watsuji within the contemporary global ethics discourse? Let us

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 406. 二十世紀においては、英語が話され、キリスト教が主要な宗教となり、アメリカ風の人生観が支配的になる、というような「一つの世界」が作り出されるのではないであろうか。これは力による同化ではない。優秀な文化がおのずからにして引き起こす同化である。

begin with a brief introduction to this field, some approaches similar to Watsuji's, and some research connected to Watsuji and other Japanese thinkers.

First, "global ethics" is not as commonly used as the term "global justice."⁵⁶ But I use this phrase to designate a wide range of interlinked discourses on ethics in the world: normative international relations theory, international ethics, ethics of globalization, global justice, relations of ethical systems across the world, etc. These movements emerged sometime between the 1980s and 90s, amidst a largely hostile situation in international relations theory where the tendency was to see global relations as anarchic, nations as egoistic, and even cooperation as merely a product of coordinated self-interest. Against these views, the various discourses of global ethics argued for the necessity of ethical theory, and used this to address key concerns like distributive justice (poverty and development) and politics (international relations, citizenship, and rights). Participants in this field came mainly from globalization theory, international relations theory, and political philosophy (with a few economists). Key figures include Mervyn Frost, Andrew Linklater, Charles Beitz, John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Thomas Pogge, David Held, Amartya Sen, and Peter Singer. However, due to the focus and participants of this discourse, the problem of cultural difference was not central to the question of global justice.

This shift to (re)claim the problem of cultural difference can be seen in more recent publications in this millennium. One of the key works here is *Cultural Politics in a Global Age* (2007) by David Held and Henrietta L. Moore. They bring in a wide range of thinkers from anthropology (Arjun Appadurai), post-colonial theory (Homi K. Bhabha),

⁵⁶ "Global ethic" (De. *Weltethos*) was first popularized by the Catholic theologian Hans Küng, but perhaps due to his focus on religion and interreligious dialogue rather than politics, economics, and interpersonal interactions, his idea of a global ethic seems to have mostly disappeared from the current discourse.

and other fields, in order to highlight the role culture plays in globalization and international relations. Here, religious difference, ethnic differences and identities, the interaction of technology and tradition, global cultural flows, and other softer issues are able to come out from under the shadow of the “hard” political and economic issues. William M. Sullivan and Will Kymlicka also have an excellent volume on *The Globalization of Ethics* (2007) which discusses how Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, and other secular perspectives approach global ethics differently. It is amidst this cultural turn that I think Watsuji has much to contribute.

However, most of these discourses in global ethics have tended to take a very distant, top-down view of ethics, either trying to coordinate the interactions of differing traditions, or reducing difference to deontological or consequential models of ethical life. One exception to this is Fiona Robinson’s *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations* (1999). Dismissing the arguments between consequentialists and deontologists and between liberals and communitarians as infighting within the same enlightenment tradition, she suggests an altogether different approach that sees care as connecting people in broader and broader ways, but, at the same time, needing to respond to a connected world that is paradoxically more and more excluding, marginalizing, and dominating. I think there are many points of convergence between Robinson and Watsuji, especially in their view of ethics as founded in relations that are becoming more and more globalized.

In the opening of this chapter, I noted that the intense “globalization” during the Meiji, Taishô, and Shôwa periods make Watsuji a particularly interesting candidate for a global ethics. Other scholars have capitalized on this potential for global philosophy in the Kyoto School of Philosophy. James Heisig’s “Tanabe’s Logic of the Specific and the

Critique of the Global Village,” Gereon Kopf’s “Between the Global and the Local: Applying the Logic of the One and the Many to a Global Age” and “Nationalism, Globalism, and Cosmopolitanism: An Application of Kyoto School Philosophy,” and John W. M. Krummel’s “World, Nothing, and Globalization in Nishida and Nancy” develop the thought of Tanabe Hajime, Nishida Kitarô, and Mutai Risaku in response to the issues in globalization. I hope this chapter contributes to reinvigorating the study of modern Japanese philosophy in this direction.

There are some preliminary works on Watsuji on the theme of globalization. One of the first works in English was Christopher Jones’s work on Watsuji and international relations.⁵⁷ Here, he positively appraises Watsuji’s critique of the (“western”) tendency to merely expand the national in guise of “internationality,” as well as the essential immorality of profit society. Additionally, Ogawa Hitoshi’s work on Watsuji’s idea of solidarity takes up how this virtue can be a universal virtue to found a cosmopolitan but culturally plural world.⁵⁸ Another very interesting recent article by Michael Murphy (University of London) on Watsuji and cosmopolitanism compares Watsuji to Gerard Delanty and Walter Dignolo in an attempt to derive a critical cosmopolitanism where the world is seen as “hetero-spatial-temporal.”⁵⁹ However, these articles tend to speak of the *possibilities* of Watsuji, but only focus on very few of Watsuji’s works, and thus do not sufficiently ground these views in a complete vision of Watsuji’s theory of national morals

⁵⁷ Christopher Jones, “Interman and the ‘Inter’ in International Relations: Watsuji Tetsurô and the Ethics of the Inbetween,” *Global Society* 17.2 (2003): 135-150.

⁵⁸ Ogawa Hitoshi, “Solidarity as a Universal Virtue: Reevaluating Watsuji Tetsuro’s *Rinrigaku*,” *Tokuyama Kôgyô Kôtô Senmon Gakkô kenkyû kiyô* 37 (2013): 51-56.

⁵⁹ Michael Murphy, “The Critical Cosmopolitanism of Watsuji Tetsurô,” *European Journal of Social Theory* (2015).

and global ethics. I suggest that the previous discussions can be seen as providing the textual basis for their work.

As we see above, there are many interesting comparisons that can be done to develop Watsuji's global ethics. However, for this section, I wish to focus on one key problem that develops from the conflict of liberalism and communitarianism: moral universalism vs. moral particularism. Because liberals tend to argue from universal human nature intrinsic in the individual, it is possible to have a cosmopolitan view of global ethics. But because communitarians see the individual as *fundamentally shaped* by community, then global ethics must consider the different concretizations and localizations of the good life, leading to a moral relativism that resists a "homogenous world order." Understanding the conflict between these two approaches is a key element to understanding conflicts like the ISIS's flouting of the global community, or conflict between ethnic groups. In order to address this problem of cosmopolitan universalism vs. moral relativism, I will compare Watsuji to Steven Lukes' *Moral Relativism* (2008).⁶⁰

In many ways, similar to Watsuji, Lukes' task in this work is to tackle two conflicting intuitions: On one hand, the notion that there is a solid, universal basis for what is right and what is wrong, and on the other hand, the notion that we cannot step outside our moral worlds, thus leading to the doubt "Who am I to judge another culture?" These are, of course, similar to the ideas of national morality and universal morality as they are discussed in Watsuji. Like Watsuji, Lukes tries to show that despite the real contradiction between moral relativism and universalism, it is possible to resolve the two.

⁶⁰ The following discussion draws from Steven Lukes, *Moral Relativism* (New York: Picador, 2008).

The universalist intuition sees all human beings as bound by their common humanity, rather than by closed communities. This common humanity was once expressed as “rationality” or as “natural law,” but now the most common discourse of universal morality is the universal human rights movement.⁶¹ This universalist view is defended by many, including anti-relativists like Harvard professor Thomas Michael Scanlon and former (Roman Catholic) Pope Benedict XVI, who warn of the dangerous effects of relativism on moral motivation, confidence, and critique.

However, against this universalist view, we have the sheer bewilderment in experiencing the moral diversity of humankind. According to Lukes, the modern discourse on this began in the 17th and 18th centuries with philosophers like Giambattista Vico and Johann Herder—interestingly the exact same figures that Watsuji chose to introduce to Japan, and from whom Watsuji built much of his theories of milieu and history. This initial impetus of Vico and Herder was picked up by anthropologists like Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Ruth Benedict (again, figures Watsuji was well aware of). Their basic argument is that morality is a part of *culture*, a multi-dimensional whole whose formation is not rational but emotional and largely unconscious. (Lukes also points out that the non-rationality of morality itself was slowly being argued by moral psychologists since the 1990s, like Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Greene.) Because we are part of *one* culture and we cannot step out from culture onto a universal rational standpoint, then there is thus something fundamentally mistaken about the attempt to judge other cultures that form in worlds that we have no real access to. Often times, when we try to judge the

⁶¹ This was first declared in 1948, shortly before Watsuji’s *Ethics III*. However, Watsuji does not seem to mention this discourse much, and I will examine why shortly.

moralities of other cultures (or other eras in history), we end up projecting our own cultural assumptions on them, in what John Cook calls the “projection error.”

From these anthropological insights in the face of apparent moral diversity, we realize that the modern project of universal morality is often one of hubris, of cultural imperialism and western ethnocentrism. Cultures can only be understood from *within*, through what Herder calls “holistic interpretation,” that situates itself within the trust relations, milieu, and history of a given culture. This cultural turn was the forerunner of multiculturalism and identity politics, which remain key socio-political issues today.

However, this cultural turn was not without its problems, and Lukes points out how this view tended to fuel a sense of exclusivity and nationalism, which is internally homogenizing and externally anti-homogenizing. Lukes raises the example of Holland, where the very attempt to create multicultural tolerance has resulted in highlighting seemingly irreconcilable differences between Muslim culture and white European (secular) culture—triggering a more collisions between these groups.

The core problem of this cultural turn was a particular view of culture as unified and clearly divided from other cultures—which Lukes calls the “mosaic” model. In response to this, he suggests three other views of culture. First is the “kaleidoscopic” view of culture like that found in Salman Rushdie and Jeremy Waldron, where individuals are seen not as rooted in just one culture but as constantly hybridizing and creating newness from this hybridity. However, Lukes sees this view as limited in that it seems to reflect merely the elite experiences of jetsetters who do not need to rely on the safety of cultural roots. A second model is that of Ann Swidler: the “toolkit” model that focuses on the individual agency of choosing from the toolbox of culture tools that can be used for the individual’s own pragmatic purposes. However, this view tends to neglect the givenness

of culture. Third is an “ecosystem” view of culture that sees culture as being like climatic regions that have overlaps and flows with each other. Lukes criticizes this for lacking the creative appropriation of the kaleidoscopic model. However, these three models—kaleidoscopic, toolkit, and ecosystem—accept cultural difference while challenging the mosaic’s model of hermetically sealed and static cultures by highlighting the dynamicity of overlapping, hybridization, and individual agency.

While accepting the realization of cultural difference, Lukes, however, wishes to sustain a universal core. On one hand, he takes the normative component of this core from Kant and Jürgen Habermas—the need for *justification*. An action can be good, regardless of culture, only if it can be justified to those involved. On the other hand, he takes an axiological component from Aristotle as developed by Martha Nussbaum: There are basic capabilities that are universal to all human beings and it is morally required that we protect their development. Thus, while retaining an awareness of the difference of cultures, he keeps cultures open to *critique* on the grounds of justifiability and the proper support of human capabilities, which form a *minimum* moral ground upon which flourishing is realized in plural ways.

How do we situate Watsuji within this contemporary discourse? I wish to discuss two points. First, it is clear that Watsuji has much affinity with the cultural turn. As we have seen in this chapter, Watsuji situates ethics within concrete human networks that are embedded in a particular history and a particular milieu. Watsuji’s notion of national existence (*kokuminteki sonzai*) is a place-holder for the cultural whole: The ethnos, and even Watsuji’s notion of the state is built as an expression of cultural totality, rather than the other way around. As such, it is clear that for Watsuji, morality needs to be understood from within the specificity of a particular culture at a particular point in time.

However, is Watsuji's notion of culture not fundamentally a "mosaic" model? I think this is a bit of an ambiguous point. As we see in Watsuji's *Climate and Culture (Fûdo)*, Watsuji sees the various milieu types as distinct, and there is a certain amount of cultural determinism and essentialism one might detect in his *typology* (of monsoon, desert, meadow, Steppe, and American milieus). However, in *Ethics II* and *III* and in *Research on the History of Japanese Spirit*, we see that for Watsuji, international exchange and cultural criticism are essential to culture, which is dynamic and interrelated. As such, in some way, his view is similar to Midgley's "ecosystem" model. However, Sakai Naoki's critique is correct in pointing out Watsuji's preoccupation on the unity of culture (rather than its fragmentation and the awkwardness of its transitions) and his marginalization of multi-cultural societies or multi-cultural individuals.⁶² In a sense, Watsuji lacks a lot of the "toolbox" and "kaleidoscopic" views of culture despite his stress on creative cultural borrowing.

Second, despite this strong moral relativism, we detect in Watsuji a clear universalist moment. Like Scanlon, Watsuji criticizes completely severing national morals from their rootedness in universal morality. Watsuji can thus argue not only for moral authority but for moral critique and moral self-overcoming as well.

However, there are considerable differences between Watsuji's and Lukes' resolution of universalism and relativism. First is the notion of discourse and justification. I think there is a lot that Watsuji can learn from Habermas. To put it simply, Watsuji's ethics is terribly anti-discursive. This is clear in his notion of language as "the expression of pre-existing mutual understanding," rather than an attempt to create consensus. This is

⁶² Sakai, 92-94 and 138-143.

also clear in the absence of feedback mechanisms in his view of the state. And even his notion of historical change has nothing to do with convincing the public through discourse, but rather the courageous (and often tragic) image of the prophet who tries to realize the subconscious image of totality that not even the masses see.

However, can moral norms be *reduced* to legitimization and discourse? For instance, can I or ought I legitimize everything I do to my children? Must a therapist disclose the rationale of all his actions to his client, even if it renders therapies ineffective? Must a Zen master perpetually explain himself to his disciples? This insistence on legitimization seems to betray an absence of trust between people. *Perhaps discourse is essential for building and renewing trust*—but perhaps there are things that go on within the space of trust that need not and ought not be discursively translated. This tells us that Lukes' universal of justification is still quite individualist, quite specific to a particular ethical tradition.

Furthermore, Lukes' notion of postmodern universality is *minimalist*. It defines a base—justifiability and keeping the threshold of human capabilities. Everything else is an excess. However, is inter-cultural critique and learning merely a matter of the *bare necessities*? We see that, while Watsuji's notion of the universal—being true to our humanity (*ningensei*) by dynamically negating self (individual or communal) wherever it may congeal—might be vague, it is hardly a minimum. In fact, one might say that it is the *maximum*—and involves a deep inter-cultural critique to realize the flourishing of human freedom. While Lukes' view might work for broad political demands like the universal human rights movement, it can say nothing about thicker forms of inter-cultural exchange like the transmission of Buddhism to the west.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen certain key contributions Watsuji has made. His attempt to situate ethics within the contours of geographic space has potential for contributing to the rethinking of ethics amidst rapidly shifting spatial contours in an age of globalization and information. Furthermore, he is one of the early figures to try to fully integrate the anthropological insights of cultural difference into his *philosophical* theory of ethics. Also, he tried to unify moral plurality, not just inter-culturally but *inter-historically*, through his own vision of universal morality. Comparing Watsuji to the contemporary discourse, we saw some dangers to his self-homogenizing view of culture and his lack of discourse ethics, but also saw possible contributions in his notion of a non-minimal, deep, universal morality that still allows for (if not actively encourages) cultural difference.

The key of Watsuji's contribution comes from *emptiness* as a "principle" of universal history. However, is emptiness really a "principle" in the ordinary sense of the word? For instance, "god" as a principle of history has been used to judge a majority of civilizations as "pagans" or "infidels." "Reason" has been used as a principle for organizing "civilized" versus "barbaric" nations. As we have seen above, Watsuji's notion of history rejects this partiality and tries to incorporate a greater plurality of difference in religion, culture, and degree of civilization. This shows in his "principle" of emptiness, for can one really use emptiness to judge if one country is superior to another? Can one easily judge whether a nationalist nation is closed in on itself and stagnant, or if this closing in is part of its individualization as a particular nation? In theory, emptiness is a *non-principle*, and allows for a greater range of developmental flexibility and mutual respect.

However, at the same time, emptiness is not completely vacuous. Watsuji's notion of emptiness seems to automatically reject *Gesellschaft* forms of society, universalist-

rationalist notions of lived morality, and liberal-utilitarian conceptions of a state. And Watsuji has a point here—these “cosmopolitan” moralities would be incompatible with the very schema of communitarian-international ethics Watsuji is suggesting.

In my reading of discussions on moral education such as Richard Smith’s and Paul Standish’s *Teaching Right and Wrong: Moral Education in the Balance*, the situation in the field may partially confirm Watsuji’s position. In their analysis of the British multicultural situation, Standish and Smith suggest that cultures that take a liberal-universalist model of morality appear to be having the hardest time with the loss of a clear universal principle in a globalized age of moral plurality, which has resulted in morality being either ejected from public discourse or filed down to a minimum.⁶³ In contrast, more community-driven moralities are still able to draw a rich sense of moral conviction from their local groups, despite the loss of confidence in universal morality.

However, might Watsuji’s notion of emptiness not be too exclusive? Is it not possible to have a notion of democracy or even capitalism that still allows for a genuine self-emptying of individuals? Perhaps Watsuji’s theory fails to truly account for the full range of plurality in the ways in which negation can occur. Advances in democratic theory such as those found in Ian Shapiro or in reappraisals of John Dewey are (indirectly) attempting to address the critiques Watsuji raised, seeing democracy not as liberal universal principles but as a *way of life* of a concrete people. Watsuji seems to have been closed to this possibility, as we see in *Ethics II*, but is this not a way to express emptiness and the selflessness of the individual and the totality?

⁶³ See the conclusion of Richard Smith and Paul Standish, *Teaching Right and Wrong: Moral Education in the Balance* (London: Trentham Books, Ltd., 1997).

Furthermore, the “content” and exclusivity of this idea of emptiness can allow this concept to be *used* for national self-aggrandizement as well. Of course the most blatant example of this is Nishitani Keiji’s essay, where he raises the Japanese idea of emptiness as a key for overcoming western modernity and as a principle for a new world order.⁶⁴ Watsuji himself, in his article “Dialectical Theology and the Ethics of the State” seems to do something similar:

The fear of nothingness (*mu*) is no other than [the result of] looking at nothingness from the standpoint of absolute being (*zettai u*). However, when one awakens [to the reality] that the true nature (*shinsō*) of the self is nothingness, we run into the very origin of existence that depends on and confronts an Other (*itateki, taitateki*). This origin is the absolute nothingness that constantly gives birth to being. Should we not place this absolute nothingness in the position of absolute other and consider *ningen sonzai* [from there]? . . . In the standpoint of faith, that which is considered to be god’s creation is in truth none other than the movement of this [absolute nothingness].⁶⁵

Here, he criticizes Western theological models and highlights his own position from a Buddhist culture as having better access to the “true absolute” of nothingness. This is particularly clear in Steve Odin’s discussion of Robert Bellah’s critique:

. . . Two notorious essays titled “The Way of the Subject in Japan” (*Nihon no shindō*) and “America’s National Character” (*Amerika no kokuminsei*), both released together in a wartime pamphlet dated July 1944. These works argued for the complete superiority of traditional Japanese culture based on the ideal of “self-negation” (*jiko hitei*) and resolve to sacrifice oneself for the imperial sovereign over that of liberal democratic American society based on individualism, egocentrism, and utilitarianism.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ See Richard F. Calichman (ed., trans.), *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁶⁵ WTZ9, 459-460. 無に対する恐怖は絶対有の立場から無を見たものにほかならない。しかし自己の真相が無であると悟るときには、我々は依他的・対他的な存在の根源に突き当たるのである。かかる根源は無限に有を生み出すところの絶対無であって、有に対立する無ではない。我々はこの絶対無を絶対他者の位置に置いて人間存在を考えるべきではなからうか。…信仰の立場において神の創造の仕事とせられたものは、実はこの[絶対無の]運動にほかならぬのである。

⁶⁶ Odin, *The Social Self*, 66-67.

Given the content and politicality of emptiness, one might wonder: Just how universal is this idea? Is emptiness not just the attempt of Japan to win imperialist universality for its own views? In the field of comparative religion, it seems (and this must remain hearsay at this point) that while many liberal Christians are intrigued by the idea of nothingness as absolute, many Muslims are suspicious of seeing god as nothingness, due to the emphasis on the *oneness* of god. This is something Tosaka Jun seems to have critiqued heavily: In the guise of universal ethics, Watsuji smuggles in a good number of things that are particularly Japanese,⁶⁷ or at least particular to Watsuji's experience as a member of the Japanese nation. This is something Watsuji came close to admitting:

I have already mentioned that the ultimate origin of *ningen sonzai* is absolute totality (*zettaiteki zentaisei*), absolute negativity (*hiteisei*). But if one gives some concrete name to this absoluteness, at that moment, one must at once incline toward some preexisting religion. . . . If one calls [it] personal god, one already bears [ideas] ranging from the personified form of god to the historical process that leads to the purification of person (*jinkaku*). Even if one simply calls it a substantially existing (*jitsuzai suru*) god, one already shows a rejection of nothingness from the standpoint of the mutual opposition of being and nothingness, due to the determination of substance. Even if one takes the stance of emptiness (*kū*) that transcends the mutual opposition of being and nothingness in order to avoid such a determination, an obvious Buddhist coloration becomes manifest there.⁶⁸

Similarly, in *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations*, Watsuji points out how pantheism is something distinctly monsoon-based, while monotheism is something that is born from the desert, and the love of reason flourishes in meadow cultures. If we are to maintain the

⁶⁷ Nishitani Kei, *Bunka to Kōkyōsei*, 29.

⁶⁸ WTZ10, 561. 人間存在の究極の根源が絶対的全体性すなわち絶対的否定性であることはすでに説いたところであるが、その絶対性に何等か具体的な名を与えるならば、その時我々は直ちに既成宗教のいずれかに傾かねばならぬであろう。…人格神と言えそこにはすでに神の擬人的形成から人格としての純化に至る歴史的過程が背負わされている。単に実在する神と言ってもすでにその実在という限定において有無相対の立場における無の排斥を示している。この限定を避けるために有無相対を超えるところの空の立場をとっても、そこには顕著に仏教の色彩が現われて来る。

principle of respecting milieu differences, we see that the schematic figure of the absolute is something that *cannot* escape climatic particularity.

In light of these problems, Sakai Naoki's critique of Watsuji in *Translation and Subjectivity* deserves close attention. First, it is impossible to fully step out of one's context into transcendental position. Thus, no matter how one may try to examine other cultures (or other *fûdo*) objectively, one is always viewing it from one's own context, one's own *fûdo*. The awareness of this reflexivity was lacking in Watsuji's treatment of milieu.⁶⁹ Second, there is something fundamentally *cowardly* in trying to escape to a transcendent position. Sakai points out how the experience of cultural difference is originally as *shutai*, as an embodied "subject," where difference is not recognized but rather experienced as a form of anxiety. Whereas the experience "by this Japanese" of this "non-Japanese context" due to these "historical/climatic differences" are all, as the quotation marks imply, objectifications of the *shukan* (the epistemological subject) as it tries to escape from the discomfort of *shutaiteki* (subjective agent's) existence.⁷⁰

It is in view of these critiques that I think Inaga Shigemi's "Japanese Philosophers Go West" is of philosophical importance, because it highlights the situatedness as well as the anxieties of Watsuji as he was faced with this experience of cultural difference.⁷¹ If one keeps in mind this situatedness and particularity, then one needs to remember that

⁶⁹ Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

I have discussed these points more extensively in my Akegarasu Prize runner-up essay. See Anton Luis Sevilla, "Gaijin Philosophy and the Problems of Universality and Culture: Conversations with Kasulis, Watsuji, and Sakai," *Hakusan Furusato Bungakushô dai 29 kai Akegarasu Haya Shô nyûsen ronbun* (Hakusan, Ishikawa, Japan: Hakusanshi kyôiku iinkai), 29-58.

⁷¹ Inaga Shigemi, "Japanese Philosophers Go West."

even if emptiness does serve as a possible “universal non-principle” for universal history across cultural difference, *one needs to constantly separate the transcendental movement* (the desire to seek what is common despite cultural barriers) *from the transcendental hubris*, the non-principle from the principle, so to speak.

Furthermore, the circumstances have changed greatly since Watsuji first wrote his *Ethics*. With cheap international transportation, widespread immigration and migrant labor, the people of various nations are much more interlinked than ever before. International media allows news to be shared from every part of the world. Communication technologies allow for instant and convenient communication internationally. The internet also allows culture to be shared borderlessly (although there are disparities of class—the “digital divide”). And most importantly, global problems like environmental change have given tasks that are shared by humankind, regardless of nation-state divisions. While Watsuji’s accommodation of space and milieu provide a robust theory for addressing these shifts, his theory of international relations needs to be updated to accommodate these changes. And the biggest roadblock to this is his repeated tendency to close the nesting of *sittliche* organizations within a homogenous nation-state. Now, more than ever, there is a need for a looser theory of overlapping spheres of human relationality that recognizes the true cultural plurality (and hybridity) of the self-emptying of individuals and totalities.

With this, we have been brought into the final problem—what I see as the core issue in Watsuji’s *Ethics*. What is this *emptiness*? It has been used as the principle of finite relation, as the outside that destabilizes liberal individuality and the communitarian “we,” and now

as the origin and telos of all history resolving all the possible differences of moralities.

What is this *emptiness*?

Chapter V. The Buddhist Roots of the Ethics of Emptiness

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the idea of emptiness, together with a cluster of synonyms (absolute totality, absolute negativity) and their functions (negation, emptying), lies at the very heart of Watsuji's systematic ethics. In each chapter, we have seen that the key to the dilemmas concerning relationality and singularity, individuality and totality, and universality and particularity lies in Watsuji's idea of emptiness. If one looks at the history of this term in Watsuji's systematic ethics, one will find that he first mentions emptiness in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* as the key to solving the dilemma of materialism vs. idealism in western philosophy. Then, in *Ethics I*, emptiness is presented as the movement of negation lying at the heart of the fundamental law of ethics. In *Ethics II*, absolute emptiness is at the heart of what is arguably the most important socio-ethical organization for Watsuji—the cultural community. And in *Ethics III*, the movement of absolute emptiness's self-emptying and self-return is seen as playing out amidst nations in history.

Thus, the centrality of these ideas cannot be disputed. However, what does emptiness *actually mean* for Watsuji? Is emptiness to be equated with community? Is it neither community nor individuality? Is it individual awakening? Is it cultural awakening? As we have seen in Chapter III, the idea of emptiness carries too many meanings to the point of being completely ambiguous and vague.

One result of this is that many scholars have been uncertain as to how to place the relationship of ethics to the *Buddhist* idea of emptiness. Is Watsuji's "ethics of emptiness" a Buddhist ethics? Or is this emptiness (if it means anything at all) something separate from Buddhism? In the English literature, this first appears in the disagreement between David Dilworth and William R. LaFleur surrounding how central Buddhism was to Watsuji's project, with the former arguing that Watsuji did not form a primarily Buddhist or religious position in his ethics,¹ and the latter showing that Watsuji's ethics cannot be understood without the Buddhist notion of emptiness.² Nagami Isamu tried to clarify Watsuji's Buddhist position,³ and I am primarily in agreement with his reading. However, I think that his treatment was too broad and lacking in detail to sufficiently show both the grounding of Watsuji's ethics in his Buddhist view, and *simultaneously* show the difficulties involved therein. By the time we get to more recent studies of Watsuji, like Robert Carter's "Interpretative Essay: Strands of Influence,"⁴ his encyclopedia entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and James Mark Shields' *Critical Buddhism: Engaging with Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought*, the general consensus leans toward LaFleur, unfortunately, ignoring Dilworth's worthwhile suggestion that there is some discrepancy between Watsuji's ethics and a Buddhist stance.

¹ David Dilworth, "Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician," *Philosophy East and West* 24.1 (1974): 3-22.

² William R. LaFleur, "Buddhist Emptiness in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Watsuji Tetsurô," *Religious Studies* 14.2 (1978): 237-250.

³ Nagami Isamu, "The Ontological Foundation in Tetsurô Watsuji's Philosophy: *Kû* and Human Existence" *Philosophy East and West* 31.3 (1981): 279-296.

⁴ Found in his translation of Watsuji's *Ethics I*.

In this chapter, I hope to correct precisely this deficiency, and answer the questions we have raised above. As Watsuji's idea of emptiness has clear Buddhist origins (which he is not necessarily faithful to), I will first begin with a rather detailed treatment of the Buddhist philosophy that he directly hitches to his *Ethics*. I will focus on his ideas of dharma, dependent arising, and emptiness in Nāgārjuna and Yogācāra Buddhism. I will then proceed to an examination of the connections of this Buddhist view to the systematic ethics, examining the application of key ideas like non-duality and negation. Finally, I will attend to the inconsistencies and complications between his Buddhist ethics and his hermeneutic (systematic) ethics, as is found in the dialectics of emptiness, the unity of is and ought, and the hermeneutic method. As such, we can better organize and clarify the multiple meanings of Watsuji's idea of emptiness and its relationship to Buddhism.

1 Retracing Watsuji's Buddhism

Watsuji has a fairly extensive engagement with Buddhist thought. He is quite famous for his guidebook to Buddhist art and architecture, *Koji junrei* (1919), which has recently been translated by Nara Hiroshi as *Pilgrimage to the Ancient Temples in Nara* (2012). In 1925-26, he lectured on *Bukkyô rinri shisôshi* (*The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*) at Kyoto Imperial University. He kept his notes for this (and it appears he may have updated them for publication), but they remained unpublished until after his death. In 1926, he came out with *Nihon seishinshi kenkyû* (*Research on the History of Japanese Spirit*). This included *Shamon Dôgen* which has recently been translated by Steve Bein as *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen* (2011). This book may have single-handedly rescued Dôgen from obscurity, and can be said to be one of Watsuji's most significant

contributions to Buddhism.⁵ In 1927, Watsuji published his dissertation entitled *Genshi Bukkyô no jissen tetsugaku (The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism)*, which is usually considered the central Buddhist work of Watsuji. Even well into his systematic ethical period, Watsuji published *Zoku Nihon seishinshi kenkyû (Further Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit, 1935)* which details the reception of Buddhist thought in Japan and its influence on art. It is telling that his very last book was on Buddhism as well—*Bukkyô tetsugaku no saisho no tenkai (The Early Development of Buddhist Philosophy)*.

Hopefully, this brief listing makes it clear that Buddhism was of paramount importance for Watsuji. How was his reception in Buddhist studies circles in Japan? According to Nakamura Hajime, Watsuji's dissertation on *Primitive Buddhism* had much impact in Japan. He contributed much to the philological analysis of Buddhist scriptures and the historical development that led to their compilation. This is something that Nakamura sees as reflecting a high level of scholarly achievement, and the Buddhologist and Indian philosophy scholar Ui Hakuju (1882-1963) himself had praised Watsuji's work highly.⁶ Furthermore, Watsuji's Buddhist works appeared to have considerable influence in philosophical circles: For instance, Takeuchi Yoshinori appears to have taken much inspiration from Watsuji's *Primitive Buddhism*,⁷ and Tanabe Hajime's *My Philosophical*

⁵ A book review including an analysis of the content of this book can be found at Anton Luis Sevilla, "Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013): 239-246.

⁶ WTZ5, 582-585.

⁷ James W. Heisig, "Translator's Introduction," in *The Heart of Buddhism*, Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: Crossroad, 1983), xvi.

Perspective on the Shôbôgenzô (Shôbôgenzô no tetsugaku shikan, 1939) was inspired by Watsuji's work on Dôgen.⁸

However, Watsuji also received much criticism: Buddhologists and scholars of Indian philosophy Kimura Taiken (1881-1930) and Akanuma Chizen (1884-1937) were particularly critical of his interpretation of the theory of dependent arising, and the former was involved in a heated exchange with Watsuji—some of which are published in the collected works as “A Response to Kimura Taiken's Critique.” More recently, Watsuji's Buddhism has also been criticized by Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirô, who argued against Watsuji from the standpoint of Critical Buddhism. Sueki and Morimura have also criticized the ethical limitations of Watsuji's Buddhist work, pointing to the “areligious” tendencies of Watsuji's Buddhist theory.⁹

The importance of Buddhism to Watsuji (and of Watsuji in Japanese Buddhist studies) is clear. But how does his Buddhist ethics fit with his *systematic* ethics? Given the shifts present in Watsuji's thought (and even in his systematic ethics), we have to be careful not to carelessly presume continuity between his early Buddhist work in the 1920s and his ethics in the 1930s and 1940s. However, Watsuji himself directly links the two in his book *Jinkaku to jinruisei (Person and Humanity, 1938)*, which he presents as a “supplement of sorts to *Ethics I*.”¹⁰

⁸ Watsuji Tetsurô, *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsurô's Shamon Dôgen*, trans. Steve Bein (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 117.

⁹ Sueki Fumihiko, “Bukkyô to kindai Nihon (13) bukkyô no hishûkyôka: Watsuji Tetsurô,” *Fukujin* 14 (2010): 77-95.

Morimura, “‘Kû’ no rinri.”

¹⁰ *WTZ9*, 319.

In this book, the article “The Concept of ‘Dharma’ and the Dialectics of Emptiness in Buddhist Philosophy” (*Bukkyô tetsugaku ni okeru ‘hō’ no gainen to kû no benshōhō*, heretofore “Dharma and Dialectics”), originally written in 1931, provides a short summary of the Buddhist ideas that directly connect to the abovementioned parts of his systematic ethical project. There are four main ideas that Watsuji presents in this article: First, is a focus on dharma (*hō*), which is interpreted as *kata*, the way of existing of existents in the everyday world. Second, is the movement toward non-discrimination shown in the theory of dependent arising. Third, is Watsuji’s understanding of the ultimate ground of emptiness (*kû*) in Nāgārjuna. And fourth, is the return from non-discriminateness to discriminateness in Yogācāra Buddhism.

Watsuji’s famous *The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism* only covers *half* of this, and thus does not adequately represent Watsuji’s entire position. Rather than *Primitive Buddhism*, the above article is structurally identical to the posthumously published manuscript, *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*, a topic on which he had lectured in 1925. Watsuji scholar and commentator Kaneko Takezō thus points out that it is this book that best articulates the Buddhist background of Watsuji’s ethical thought.¹¹

In order to articulate the theoretical core that influences Watsuji’s systematic ethics, I will first examine these four points—dharma, dependent arising, Nāgārjunian emptiness, and Yogācāra consciousness—through his supplementary essay, and thresh out its details using his lecture notes where the essay does not provide enough detail.

¹¹ WTZ11, 459.

In analyzing this essay, I have received much help from Watsuji scholar Kuriyama Haruna. See her “Watsuji rinrigaku ni okeru Bukkyô kenkyû no ichizuke,” *Shakai shisutemu kenkyû* 17 (2014): 111-122.

2 Primitive Buddhism: Dharma and Dependent Arising

2.1 Dharma

In “Dharma and Dialectics,” Watsuji argues that Buddhist philosophy is a *Dharmatheorie* (*hōron*). But what do we mean here by dharma? In this essay, Watsuji criticizes the idea, common in Japan, that dharmas are merely things:

How about Japan? . . . Various thinkers usually understand dharma as a “thing,” “phenomenon,” or “object-nature.” In other words, they take the concept of “dharma,” which was first used to express the *true aspect* of empirical phenomena, to mean the individual empirical objects themselves, in a naïve realism. . . . This misunderstanding of the meaning of dharma in Japan is perhaps mainly due to an underestimation of Hīnayāna.¹²

Watsuji thus agrees with Buddhologist Otto Rosenberg’s criticism of this naïve realism. But what Rosenberg suggests is an ontological or metaphysical *Dharmatheorie*, which sees dharma as truly real “transcendentals,” unknowable bearers or foundations of the elements within the flow of experience. This is something Watsuji cannot agree with, for it misses the point of Nāgārjuna’s notion of emptiness and ends up with a Buddhist “metaphysics” in the *bad* sense.

Thus, we see Watsuji trying to strike a middle path between naïve realism and transcendental metaphysics, using an idea of dharma that unifies both the Abhidharma insight (dharmas are not things) and the Mādhyamika insight (that dharmas are grounded in emptiness). He sees this in the idea of *kata* (form):

¹² WTZ9, 464. 日本はどうであるか。…諸学者は、通例法を「もの」「現象」「物柄」などと解する。諸法は万物万有と解せられる。言いかえれば、経験的現象の真相を現すために用いられ始めた「法」の概念が、素朴实在論的に、個々の経験的対象そのものを意味するとせられるのである。…日本においてかくも法の意義が誤解せられたのは、主としてその小乗軽視にもとづくのであろう。

In this way, living beings can, within the existents in reality that they deal with in their everyday life, see these “dharmas” that make existents be. These dharmas as “*kata*,” or the way existents exist, are the dharmas of Buddhist philosophy, and the self-nature or non-self-nature of these dharmas has been a great problem in the development of this philosophy. Ever since primitive Buddhism, the search for a transcendental reality outside of real existents and their “*kata*” of existence, has been strongly rejected.¹³

Let us clarify the motivation of these daring reappropriations through Watsuji’s lecture notes.

The discussion of dharma comes up in the opening chapter of *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*, entitled “The Standpoint of No-Self.” Here, one can see the *soteriological* and *ethical* value of the theory of dharma in Watsuji’s view of primitive Buddhism. He begins with selections from the *Connected Discourses* (Pali *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN) 22, where the Buddha teaches that the five *skandhas* (bundles, *goun*) are all impermanent; they are a cause of suffering (if we cling to them), and, as a cause of suffering, they are therefore not fit to be called “self.” Watsuji sees this as enacting a two-fold refutation: On one hand, there is nothing outside the empirical world of the five *skandhas*—no transcendent that can be a source of solidity for the self. Here, this is a refutation of the pre-Buddhist metaphysics of Brahman-Atman. On the other hand, anything within the empirical world is impermanent and thus a cause of suffering. This refutes the “empiricism” of clinging to any phenomenal reality as a ground for one’s being. Thus, there is no place to establish self—and this is the key perspective of “no-self.”

¹³ Ibid., 469-470. かくして衆生は、その日常生活的に交渉する現実の存在者において、かかる存在者をあらしむる「法」を、すなわち存在者の存在する仕方を、見ることができる。かかる「かた」としての「法」が仏教哲学における法であり、この法の自性と無自性がこの哲学の発展上重大な問題とされたのである。現実的な存在者とその存在の「かた」とのほか、なお超越的実在者を認めることは、問題が仏教の哲学に関する限り、原始仏教の時代よりすでに極力排斥せられたところであった。

This is I think quite uncontroversial. But what is interesting here is the Husserlian and Neo-Kantian bent that Watsuji gives this reading of no-self.¹⁴ First, he refers to the standpoint that seeks self, the standpoint of the fool, as “the standpoint of calculating self” (*keiga* 計我). He writes,

The *standpoint of calculating self* that erects an unchanging self amidst the five *skandhas* is the standpoint of the ignorant, unhearing fool. This includes the ordinary way of thinking that sees the world as confronting the self, and that sees the self as cognizing the world via representation (*moshateki*).¹⁵

He directly names this as the “natural standpoint,” which is the Husserlian term for the standpoint that sees that objects are distinct from and perceived by the subject, and defines it identically.¹⁶

In contradistinction to this dualism of the natural standpoint, the standpoint of no-self takes its foundation in dharma. But here too, Watsuji’s reading of “dharma” is heavily phenomenological and Neo-Kantian. He describes dharmas as “forms” (*keishiki*), “categories” (*hanchû* 範疇), and “ontic or material essences” (*sonzaiteki sozaiteki honshitsu*). While he has yet to refer to them as the form of existence (*sonzai no kata*), they already mean the same. Furthermore, dharmas are not forms of *material* existence, nor categories of consciousness, but are categories of existence *prior to the subject-object split*, where the phenomena are the real (and there are no *noumena* behind them). They are thus the

¹⁴ I thank Sueki Fumihiko for this hint.

¹⁵ *WTZ19*, 49. この五受陰において無常ならざる我を立つる（我見を生ずる）計我の立場が愚痴無聞凡夫の立場であって、我に対立する世界を認め、我がその世界を模写的に認識するという常識的な考えがこれに属する。

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

absolute, atemporal essences that determine themselves in order to give rise to finite, temporal phenomena.¹⁷

An example of a theory of dharma prevalent in early Buddhism that Watsuji reinterpreted is that of the five *skandhas* of existence. Form (*shiki* 色) is the sensibility of all existence. Feeling (*ju* 受) is the receptivity that makes experience possible. Perception (*sô* 想) points to how epistemologically (and not psychologically), all content from contact take the form of an image. Acts¹⁸ (*gyô* 行) refer to the pure activity of all responses to contact. And consciousness (*shiki* 識) is the distinguishing through which all things exist. Each and every phenomenon is a bundle of these five categories. Rather than the conventional reading of there being pre-existing forms that are felt or perceived by a pre-existing subject who acts and has consciousness, Watsuji argues that each experience in non-dual reality has its form, reception, image, activity, and consciousness. This is true for my experience of myself, of other people, of things, of ideas, of feelings, and so on.

For Watsuji, wisdom (*hannya* 般若) does not lie in the realization that these five bundles exist. Rather, wisdom lies in the realization that all reality is made up of these five *dharms* and *thus impermanent*. We see that phenomena *are phenomena*, changing, and thus not to be clung to as “self.” There is no stable self—not within material existence

¹⁷ There are several references to Nishida Kitarô in the notes, and perhaps his influence is most clear in this assertion of non-duality. There are also possible links in the idea of “the self-determination of universals.” Readers interested in this can examine the following books on the relationship between Nishida and Watsuji:

Kôsaka Masaaki, *Nishida Kitarô to Watsuji Tetsurô* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1964).

Ichikura Hirotsuke, *Chôkindai no shihyô: Nishida to Watsuji no baai* (Kawasaki: Senshû Daigaku Jinbunkagaku Kenkyûjo, 1986).

¹⁸ This can be translated as mental formations, impulses, volition, etc. from the Sanskrit *saṃjñā*, but Watsuji translates it as *Akt*.

nor in the world of ideas, neither within phenomena nor outside them. And the one who has realized this is thus able to take a stand “outside” the spatio-temporal world of experience, in the absolute, unchanging world of dharma.

2.2 Dependent Arising

Watsuji points out that *Dharmatheorie* has many forms: the three marks, the five *skandhas*, the six entrances, dependent arising, and so on. However, with the attempt to systematize the dharmas, particularly using the five *skandhas*, there arose a tendency toward seeing dharmas as transcendent ideas—an error Watsuji sees the Abhidharmas as tending to fall into. This allows metaphysics to get in “via the back door,” so to speak, clinging to the categories of reality upon realizing that reality itself cannot be clung to. This contradicts Watsuji’s idea of no-self.

However, there is an antidote for this substantializing tendency, which, while most developed in Nāgārjuna, is also found in the primitive Buddhist idea of dependent arising (*engi*, Skt. *pratīyasamutpāda*). This is clear in Watsuji’s lecture notes, which I shall return to shortly. But in “Dharma and Dialectics,” the main point of *engi* that Watsuji highlights is the movement toward non-discrimination. The search for the dharmas of the infinity of phenomena is one move toward such. The search for what makes dharmas *dharma*s is the culmination of that. He writes:

Discriminate dharmas all depend on a dharma that, as its condition for possibility, always means its *negation*. The ultimate of that is ignorance (*mumyô*). Because there is ignorance, all dharmas exist, and by extinguishing (*metsu*) ignorance, all dharmas are extinguished. Thus, all dharmas are unified by ignorance. But ignorance is the *negation of clarity* (*myô*). And clarity is “extinguishing,” *absolute negation*. Not only is the unity of all dharmas itself carried out as the path of negation, that extreme—ignorance—is the negation of absolute negation. Therefore, “extinguishing ignorance”

must be the negation of the negation of absolute negation. Needless to say, this is the return to absolute negation.¹⁹

If one reads this with *Ethics* in mind, it is *immediately clear* that what Watsuji is describing here is the very engine of his ethical system. Let us turn again to the lecture notes in hopes of some clarification.

Watsuji discusses dependent arising as the second pillar of primitive Buddhist philosophy (the first being the standpoint of no-self). Perhaps in reading the account of Watsuji's *Dharmatheorie*, one can find that the quest for absolute atemporal dharmas he mentions is dangerously close to metaphysics. The theory of dependent arising tries to correct this tendency by showing that even these absolute non-dualistic categories are *conditioned*. And, unlike the theory of five *skandhas*, dependent arising has impermanence worked into the very system of dharmas, making it less likely to become the "raft" that people carry on their backs even on dry land.

Watsuji's approach to dependent arising is peculiar in several respects. First, he argues that it must be thought of from the standpoint of no-self, which, for him, means seeing dependent arising not as temporal causation but as logical conditioning. I surmise that this is tied to his previous idea of dharmas as forms/categories of non-dual phenomena. If dharmas—including the links of dependent arising—are categories, they cannot "cause" each other like a thing might cause another. Rather, they make each other (*onto-*)logically possible, and are thus temporally simultaneous. This would also be in

¹⁹ WZ9, 471-472. 差別的なる法はその可能の条件として常におのれの否定を意味する法に依存する。その究極は無明である。無明あるによって一切の法があり、無明滅するによって一切の法が滅する。しからば一切法は無明に統一せられているのである。しかるに無明は明の否定である。そうして明は「滅」である、絶対の否定である。一切法の統一がそれ自身否定の道によって行われるのみならず、その究極たる無明は絶対的否定の否定である。しからば「無明の滅」は絶対的否定の否定の否定でなくてはならない。それは取りもなおさず絶対的否定に帰ることである。

agreement with Nāgārjuna's critiques of the metaphysicality of causation that Watsuji will take up later in both the article and the lecture notes.

Second, and corollary to this, Watsuji insists that the theory of dependent arising be seen as separate from the theory of the soul—*samsāra*, karma, and so on—which Watsuji despises as mere superstitions that were merely borrowed by Buddhism.²⁰ Thus, Watsuji rejects the most common reading of dependent arising across several lifetimes, and he sees all the limbs of *engi* as not only within the same lifetime but within each instant of the experience of phenomena. This rejection of these “irrational” elements of Buddhist philosophy shows that Watsuji's reading was not a faithful study of Buddhism as it was lived, but tends toward a modernist and rational reading of Buddhism as it “ought to be,” through textual hermeneutics. This is something that Sueki has rightly criticized.²¹

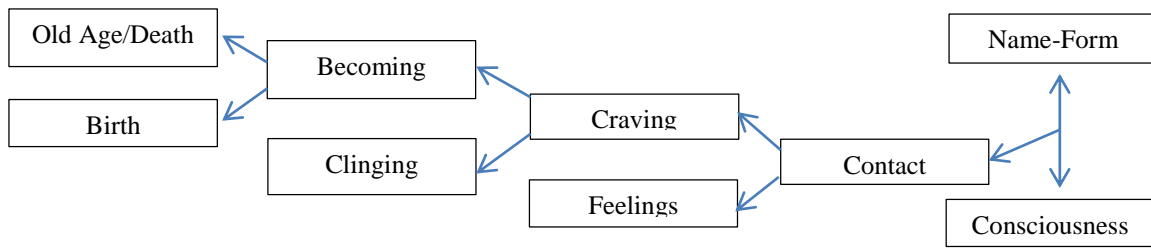
Watsuji discusses the historical development of the theory of *engi* from its simplest form (ignorance leads to attachment which leads to suffering) to the nine, ten, and 12-limb models of dependent arising. It appears that his favored model is the nine-limb model of *engi*. He eventually incorporates mental formations and ignorance into this (but ignores “senses,” first introduced in the ten-limb model). He also has a very dialectical reading of dependent arising. Because of the peculiarity of his model, allow me to go over it in some detail.

²⁰ He discusses the theory of the soul and reincarnation in “Japanese Literary Arts and Buddhist Philosophy,” which is part of *Further Research on the History of Japanese Spirit*. In this essay, he similarly laments the notion of transmigration as an impurity within Buddhist theory, but concedes its potency in giving Buddhism cultural influence. See Watsuji Tetsurō, “Japanese Literary Arts and Buddhist Philosophy,” 99-100.

²¹ SUEKI Fumihiko, “Watsuji Tetsurō no genshi Bukkyō ron” *Kindai Nihon to Bukkyō: Kindai Nihon no shisō/saikō II* (Tokyo: Transview, 2004). Another key problematic here would be that Watsuji's idea of Buddhism would have next to nothing to do with one's relationship with the dead—this relationship of course being central to the actual practice of Buddhism in Japan.

The nine limbs of *engi* are as follows (with the arrows moving from the condition to the conditioned): old age and death ← birth ← becoming ← clinging ← craving ← feelings ← contact ← name and form ⇔ consciousness. For Watsuji, old age and death point to the many forms of suffering in the impermanence and perishing of realities. Birth refers to coming to existence *in general*—the beginning of impermanent existence. Only if things come into existence can they perish; thus, birth “negates” perishing as its condition. Becoming refers to temporal, conditioned existence, which makes arising and perishing possible. It is thus the dialectical synthesis of birth and old age and death. Clinging is the very essence of desire. It is not psychological but the ontological condition of phenomena as clinging, which binds the before and after in change, making becoming possible. Craving means desiring satisfaction in what we grasp, which makes clinging possible. This activity of seeking satisfaction in general is an essence that particularizes itself in all phenomena, and not a mere psychological desire. It dialectically unites clinging (making static) and becoming (dynamic) as an essence, much like Schopenhauer’s will to life. Feeling is receptivity in general. If we did not feel anything, we could not seek satisfaction. This is, in turn, conditioned by contact. Both name and form (*nāmarūpa*) and consciousness condition contact. Name and form indicate particular existence—what it is and that it is. These are in a mutually conditioning relationship with consciousness. Consciousness is the discrimination that makes particular existence (*nāmarūpa*) possible. But without particular existence, there is no discriminating consciousness either.

What we see here is the following dialectic cascade:



Thus, each category is made possible and negated by its antithesis, and this thesis-antithesis pair are grounded by a synthesizing dharma, which in turn has an antithesis, and so on. What we see here is a very strongly Hegelian reading of dependent origination, which, while perhaps quite palpably modernistic, beautifully illustrates the existential *tensions* inherent within the experience of suffering.

A key to Watsuji’s theory of *engi* is its gradual descent into *nothing*. From each stage of dialectic, one continuously asks, “What makes this possible?”, thus, going deeper into the ground of all dharmas. But at the bottom of the nine-limbed model, one is not able to find a *single root*. This leads to the development of the 12-limbed model. Here, with the addition of acts of body, mouth, and mind that conditions name-form and consciousness, one arrives at the “house builder” that constructs phenomena. What drives this house-builder? Acts are conditioned by ignorance—the ignorance of the dharma, the standpoint of the fool, the natural standpoint. But interestingly, this pair (acts and ignorance) ensures that while *engi* is unified by ignorance, ignorance keeps it groundless as well:

No matter how far one digs into the significance of doing (*isaku*), one can never say that there is “*the standpoint of the fool*” or “ignorance” at its foundation. Ignorance only comes forth if, in opposition to the world of being-at-doing (*ui*) that comes to be with acts as its foundation, one stands in a *higher standpoint* and recognizes a *world of non-doing*. Therefore, acts are *determined matters*, and yet they do not have anything to found self. And because they are determined, they cannot of themselves be the ultimate foundation.

If one thoroughly develops this way of thinking, acts are unfounded (*mukonkyo*). Therefore, there is no ultimate foundation. In other words, the ultimate foundation is emptiness (*kû*). No, it is the emptiness of emptiness.²²

As we see above, Watsuji's lecture notes clarify what it means to seek out the dharmas of experience, and the dharmas that condition these. This series of founding negations allow for a dialectic descent toward the root of all dharmas—the unifying category of ignorance. The realization of wisdom with respect to the theory of dependent arising is the realization that the world of phenomena is the world of acts, which is conditioned by ignorance. It is a realization that all of my experiences are grounded on dharmas, which are in turn rooted in ignorance. This thus extinguishes all dharmas and, in turn, extinguishes all phenomena—a return to absolute negation.

However, this raises a question that has ramifications not just for Watsuji's idea of “returning to absolute negation,” but the return *from* absolute negation: How is it possible to realize wisdom, when all acts and all consciousness are within the world of the fool? Is there a separate form of consciousness that is “pure?” Watsuji denies this, and instead challenges the usual understanding of extinguishing (*metsu*): “If we take extinguishing to mean *sublation*, then the standpoint of the fool is sublated and all phenomena are extinguished along with it. But *these are brought to life as moments in a standpoint*

²² WTZ19, 117. 為作の意義をいかに掘り下げても、その根底に「凡夫の立場」あるいは「無明」があるとは言えぬ。無明が出てくるのは行を根拠として成立する有為の世界に対して無為の世界を認めるところのより高き立場に立つが故である。したがって行は限定せられたものであるが、しかも己れを根拠づけるものを持たぬ。限定せられたものであるがゆえに、己れが究極の根拠であることはできない。

もしこの考えを徹底させれば、行は無根拠である。したがって、究極の根拠は存しない。言いかえれば、究極の根拠は空である。否、空の空である。

of higher freedom.”²³ Extinguishing is a sublation that raises all the dharmas in dependent arising to a higher level. This allows for acts, consciousness, craving, even suffering to appear *in the form of negation*, as the realization of truth, of extinguishing/*nirvāṇa*. This thus shows the movement down the ladder of dependent arising all the way to absolute negation/extinguishing and then *up* the ladder back to the world of discriminate dharmas. But, rather than an affirmation of everydayness, one might say that this is a world of discrimination *twice-removed* from the everyday world—first, by the negation of all dharmas, and second, by the realization of these dharmas as expressions of negation.

2.3 The Foundation of Morality

Given the above highly theoretical discussions of Buddhism, one might wonder where the praxis is in Watsuji’s declaration that primitive Buddhism is “practical philosophy.” However, the two theoretical discussions above end with a caveat. After his discussion of his *Dharmatheorie*, he writes: “However, concerning this world of extinguishing, *all descriptions are impossible*. Not only can it not be experienced or cognized, it is not something one can think about. It is a *mysterium* that can only be attained by praxis.”²⁴ Similarly, after his discussion of dependent arising, he writes:

The understanding of this negation can be first attained only by awaiting its bodily attainment (*taitoku*); thus, Buddhist philosophy is a particularly practical philosophy. The *philosophieren* we are attempting here, if we were to use Buddhist terms, is none other than standing in the *standpoint of wisdom* (*chie*). However, in order for that

²³ *Ibid.*, 120. 滅を止揚という意とすれば、凡夫の立場が否定され、一切の現象もまたそれとともに滅するが、しかしそれはより高き自由なる立場において契機として生かされることになる。

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 72. しかしながらこの滅の世界が何であるかに対しては、一切の陳述が不可能である。それは経験可能、認識可能でないのみならず、思惟可能でもない。ただある実践によって達せられる神秘（Mysterium）である。

standpoint of wisdom to immediately become extinguishing and be realized would require not merely cognition but bodily realization (*taigen*).²⁵

Watsuji warns that in order to realize the soteriological value of these theoretical insights, the bodily practices of morality are indispensable. In order to do these deliberate warnings some justice, I wish to refer to the third chapter of *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought* entitled “The Foundation of Morality,” despite the fact that it receives no mention in “Dharma and Dialectics.”

How then are we to fully realize, to *bodily attain* this wisdom? Watsuji says that this is made possible by the Buddhist ethical way (*michi*), whose foundational model can be found in the noble eightfold path that is meant to guide all people, both monks and laypeople alike. According to Watsuji, the noble eightfold path takes right view as both its point of departure and its *telos*. Right view is the wisdom of seeing phenomena as phenomena, of seeing how the world of the natural standpoint is grounded on ignorance. While a basic grasp of this is necessary to even begin the Buddhist path, the 2nd to the 8th limbs of the noble path are an attempt to cultivate, embody, and express this right view.

For Watsuji, the living out of this noble path requires one’s entire being—the cognitive, volitional, linguistic, corporeal, and intersubjective elements of one’s personality. Right intention is composed of various forms of self-reflection that test one’s resolve and commitment to the path. Right effort orients one’s will. Right mindfulness and right concentration orient one cognitively toward realizing extinction.²⁶ However, these practices

²⁵ Ibid., 122. この否定の理解はその体得を待って初めて得られるるのであって、ここに仏教哲学が特に実践哲学として特徴づけられるゆえんが存する。我々がここに試みている *philosophieren* は仏教の語を用うれば智慧の立場に立つことにほかならぬが、しかしその智慧の立場が直ちに滅となって実現せらるるためには単に認識ではなくて体現でなくてはならぬ。

²⁶ Watsuji highlights the role of Zen Buddhism here, showing his continued value for it, which began with his early work on Dōgen.

of “mind” are inseparable from the “bodily” practices—right speech, right action, and right livelihood, which orient one’s personality toward the way in speech, action, and in one’s engagement with one’s community. Watsuji writes, “Here, what is aimed for is realizing the *sublation of the natural standpoint* in the necessities of life. . . The way of right livelihood can be seen as a way of moralizing the necessities of life.”²⁷

In the noble eightfold path, one responds to the demand to realize *how reality really is*. What we see here is a very different way of engaging the is-ought problem. Watsuji points out that, in our *experience* of reality within the natural standpoint, is and ought are actually quite closely intermingled. Our experience of how things are is always colored by our personal and cultural values. There is thus something quite artificial about the notion of a dichotomy between fact and value.

However, these facts are not how reality really is, but merely as they are seen from within the standpoint of the fool, who does not realize the impermanence of phenomena and the impossibility of locating self within them. Similarly, these values are not yet those of the way, for these values often represent individual and communal ways of instituting self. Thus, the truth and the goodness of emptiness are hidden from the world of the self, as a truth that both grounds the real but is *unrealized*. The path is then about realizing this “truly is” that truly “ought to be”—that is distinct from the facts and values of the natural standpoint, but at the same time makes them possible. Watsuji writes,

²⁷ WTZ19, 149. ここでも衣食住において自然的立場の止揚を実現するのが眼目であって…正命の道は、衣食住の道徳化の道であると見ることができる。

This view of the indispensability of *sila* is very much in agreement with contemporary views, for instance, in Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

In this way, the characteristic of Buddhist ethics can be seen in the effort for realization, wherein understanding the truth is done with one's whole lifestyle and personality. Realizing truth and realizing goodness are not separate. In this way, the assertion that Buddhism is entirely an ethics is correct. However, in this case, ethics is not one that is at the same level as logic or religion, but ethics at the very foundation of logic.²⁸

Because of the distance (that is not a separation) between the standpoint of calculating self and the standpoint of no-self, Watsuji says that it is impossible to explain within the parameters of calculating self why it is necessary to realize the standpoint of no-self. Thus, in response to another Buddhologist, Max Walleser, he argues that one cannot see Buddhism as a utilitarian or Epicurean task to free oneself from pain and realize true happiness. In Buddhism, both pleasure and pain can cause suffering. Thus, the path is about this suffering that arises from one's unfree relationship with impermanence rather than pain or pleasure on the level of ego. It is misreadings of this sort that arise from trying to explain in ego terms the annihilation of ego. This Epicurean Buddhism is still just the fool trying to establish self in seeking serenity and joy.

However, despite this seeming logical opacity of the moral demand, Watsuji says that we *do* experience this call even despite our being completely mired in the natural standpoint. But he writes, "The 'demand' to sublimate the natural standpoint, even when it arises within the natural standpoint, already comes from the manifestation of a higher standpoint."²⁹ This attests to the "permeability" of the natural standpoint, which I think (although Watsuji does not say this) is due entirely to the possibility of experiencing

²⁸ Ibid., 151. かくのごとく真理の理解が全生活全人格をもってするところの実現の努力として現われるところに仏教倫理の特質が存する。真理の実現と善の実現とは別物ではない。この意味において仏教は単に倫理学であるとの主張は正しい。しかしこの場合の倫理学は論理学や宗教と並立せる倫理学ではなくして、論理学の根拠に倫理学ありとの意味での倫理学である。

²⁹ Ibid., 141. 自然的立場を止揚せんとする「要求」は、たといそれ自然的立場において起こるとしても、すでにより高き立場の現われとして生起したと考えなければならぬ。

duḥkha (*ku*, suffering), through which we can be called toward something beyond. Furthermore, Watsuji points out that this call is not merely to escape the world of suffering, but to *conquer* the world of suffering and impermanence, to sublimate it, and to bring all phenomena home to their foundation—to true freedom—not just for myself (for in this standpoint there is no self), but for all.

Recapitulation

No-self and dependent arising are the two pillars of Watsuji's view of primitive Buddhism. The standpoint of no-self sees phenomena as phenomena, and, in realizing their impermanence, lets go of the attempt to establish self, whether in the material or ideal realm. Watsuji's view of *Dharmatheorie* reflects his non-dual view of reality, where realizing the dharmas forms/categories of reality allows one to go beyond the world of impermanence into the ground that conditions this impermanence. Dependent arising shows us that these very dharmas that free us from our attachment to phenomena are themselves conditioned and thus not to be clung to metaphysically either. A realization of the dharmas of *engi* shows us the various tensions that condition our suffering amidst the impermanence of reality, and how they are rooted in the groundless ground of ignorance. However, a realization of no-self and dependent arising requires the practice of the Buddhist path that cultivates, embodies, and expresses this realization in every aspect of one's existence. This Buddhist path is morality, an ought that aims to realize what reality really is, beneath the superficial entanglements of fact and value in the world of phenomena. This calls us to transcend the everyday, but also to bring the everyday world *home* to its foundation in emptiness.

3 Mahāyāna: The Return to and from Emptiness

I believe Watsuji's view of primitive Buddhism presents the general theoretical core that Watsuji uses, but his reading of Mahāyāna Buddhism fine-tunes the core idea of emptiness in a way that makes it even more radical. Let us briefly examine Mādhyamika (*Chûganha*) and Yogācāra (*Yugagyô, Yuishiki*) Buddhism.

3.1 Nāgārjuna

Watsuji's reading of Mādhyamika focuses directly on Nāgārjuna. He has repeatedly discussed the importance of Nāgārjuna in realizing the emptiness of phenomena and of the dharmas that are beneath them. However, Watsuji's reading of Nāgārjuna is peculiar, particularly in his understanding of the theory of two truths. In *MMK XXIV*, Nāgārjuna writes:

The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is based on two truths: A truth of worldly convention and an ultimate truth. Those who do not understand the distinction drawn between these two truths do not understand the Buddha's profound truth. Without a foundation in the conventional truth, the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught. Without understanding the significance of the ultimate, liberation is not achieved.³⁰

The usual reading of this (common even in current Buddhist literature) is that conventional truth is the "worldly truth" that sees things as truly existing.³¹ But Watsuji points out that that would merely be the standpoint of the fool which is *not* truth at all, but rather ignorance. Rather, conventional or worldly truth should be seen as the *truth* about the world of phenomena—realizing the dharmas from the standpoint of wisdom. However, this realization tends to take dharmas as discriminate and real—as in the metaphysical

³⁰ Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhymakakārikā*, trans. Jay L. Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 68.

³¹ For instance, see Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2009), 77-78.

approach to dharmas. Thus, Nāgārjuna seeks to ground this worldly truth on ultimate truth—the truth of emptiness—which does not destroy the truth of the dharmas, but merely shows how they are conditioned and thus without self-nature.

Nāgārjuna tries to accomplish this through what Watsuji calls “Nāgārjunian dialectics.” Watsuji highlights two facets of this. First is the dialectic unity of discrimination and non-discrimination. For example, eyes and forms cannot exist independent of each other (for an eye that cannot see forms is not an eye, and forms that cannot be seen by an eye are not forms). Thus, both are empty. In emptiness, eyes and forms are one—non-discriminate. But precisely because they are empty and non-discriminate, they can exist as discriminate (the eye sees and form is seen). This shows a movement that simultaneously negates and reestablishes difference in founding dharmas in emptiness. The second insight is that,

Emptiness is the movement of negation. Nāgārjuna’s notion that emptiness-non-discrimination gives birth to discriminate dharmas is not a matter of bringing in some *thing* called emptiness (transcendent) and founding dharmas with it. Rather, that emptiness is the foundation that the very dharmas that arise from emptiness are *emptied*.³²

Given these insights, Watsuji re-reads the saying, “defeating heresy is proclaiming the truth.” First, heresy here is *Dharmatheorie* taken as absolute—not a non-Buddhist fiction. He is thus pointing out that there is no separate truth that is revealed when we extinguish the world of discriminate dharmas. Rather, the “truth” proclaimed by “defeating heresy” is merely these discriminate dharmas sublated on the dimension of emptiness, no longer existing as being, but as moments for the freedom of emptiness.

³² WTZ9, 473. 空が否定の運動たることである。 竜樹が空無差別によって差別の法を成ずるのは、空というもの（超越者）を持ち来たって法を根拠づけるのではない。空が根底であるとは、空によって成ぜらるる法そのものが空ぜらるることである。

As such, we have seen that, in Watsuji's reading of Nāgārjuna, *dharmas* (and not mere things) are seen as mutually dependent and, through negation, founds them in emptiness. It is necessary to reassert that Watsuji does *not* see this as, a) a mere negation of the reality of the fool (for this misses the fact that negation is not destructive but a *found-ing*), nor b) as a negation that founds the reality of the fool (for Watsuji has no desire to provide the foundation for that). It is a negation that founds *prajñā*—nothing more, nothing less. Therefore, he presents a reading of Nāgārjuna that is doubly critical of the natural standpoint, rather than an affirmation of it, like some misreadings of the “unity of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*” might suggest.³³

3.2 Yogācāra Buddhism

In “Dharma and Dialectics,” Watsuji argues that the *return* from emptiness to discriminate reality is most thoroughly developed in Yogācāra Buddhism. Focusing on Vasubandhu, he sees Yogācāra as trying to synthesize the insights of Mādhyamika with a more positive appraisal of Abhidharmic *Dharmatheorie*. Watsuji says:

The Mādhyamika thesis that all discrimination is possible in non-discrimination becomes the thesis in Yogācāra philosophy that the *hypothesis* (in other words fundamentally empty hypothesis) of discriminate self (sentient beings) and dharmas are no more than the *movement of mind* (*shiki no tenpen*).³⁴

³³ Various details of this theory—the critique of causation, change, dharmas, persons, acts, and so on—are to be found in *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*, but the core theory is clear in “Dharma and Dialectics.”

For more on the dangers of misreading the unity of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, see Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, 2nd edition, with Anthony Tribe and Alexander Wynne (London: Routledge, 2012), 111.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 475. 一切の差別は無差別において可能であるとの中観哲学のテーゼは、瑜伽行哲学においては、差別的なる我（衆生）と法との仮説（すなわち実相は空である）がただ識の転変に過ぎぬとのテーゼとなった。

All reality is thus unified in mind (Skt. *viññāna*). However, if we examine *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*, we see an important qualification for his reading of mind:

“Nothing outside” (*mukyô*) [mind] is strictly asserted with the background of a system of dharma that maintains the standpoint of no-self. It is by no means a one-dimensional preaching of psychological, or a subjective “consciousness.”

“Mind” in Mind-Only is not our consciousness or our symbols. It declares that in a standpoint that has left behind all “self” and thinks about the “dharmas” of all existence, only mind can be the ultimate refuge (*shoe*) for all other dharmas.³⁵

This refutes the psychological or subjective idealistic readings of Yogācāra common even in contemporary readings of Yogācāra.³⁶ Rather, perhaps what Watsuji is intending here is to consider mind as the core foundation of the dharmas of non-dual reality. Thus, this model dictates the ontological structure of reality as experience—categories of phenomena in a world without *noumena*. In this sort of mind, all dharmas become like figments of a dream—merely reflections of the shifting of this primordial mind.

Reducing dharmas to figments of a dream continues the project of negation that we have seen in Watsuji’s readings of primitive Buddhism and in Nāgārjuna. Thus, mind appears to be a placeholder for the same idea of emptiness as well. Watsuji says that, though this mind may turn and churn out various forms of discriminate dharmas, mind is fundamentally empty. Watsuji briefly discusses the theory of store consciousness (Skt.

³⁵ WTZ19, 360-361. 「無境」が厳密に無我の立場を守る法の体系を背景として主張するのであって、決して心理学的な、すなわち主観の意味における「意識」の一元を説くのではないという点である。…

唯識にいうところの「識」とはわれわれの意識、われわれの表象ではない。「我」を抜き去って一切の存在の「法」を考える立場において、ただ識法のみが一切の他の法の究極の所依であると説くのである。

³⁶ Compare with Sueki Fumihiko, *Shisô toshite no Bukkyô nyûmon* (Tokyo: Transview, 2006), 96-100. The basic definitions of the Japanese terms were derived from here.

ālayavijñāna) and seeds (Skt. *bīja*) in order to elaborate this idea. Mind, as empty, is seen here to be identical with store consciousness:

This mind as “empty place,” in turning itself and becoming all seeds, is the mind that is truly without nature (*shinjitsu mushô*). However, because “emptiness” is none other than “self-emptying,” it empties itself and becomes being. In other words, consciousness becomes seed-consciousness.³⁷

In giving rise to discrimination, it produces seeds. These seeds, in turn, are the ground of the arising of dharmas. Thus, all dharmas are rooted in emptiness. However, in the reverse direction, the extant workings of consciousness (*gengyô*) also influence the store consciousness by “perfuming” (*kunjû*) the seeds. Thus, Watsuji gives the following conclusion:

However, from the very beginning, Yogācāra philosophy did not say that consciousness is independent and from thence moves [to form] discriminate dharmas. . . . Here, consciousness is the foundation that makes discriminate dharmas possible, and, at the same time, is itself made possible by discriminate dharmas. In other words, non-discriminateness makes discriminateness possible, and, at the same time, cannot exist without discriminateness. This is the same as the notion that emptiness empties even itself.³⁸

The reality of everyday experience is rooted in dharmas, which, of themselves, are merely figments of a dream. Thus, we cannot cling to reality or to dharmas. But the key point here is that we cannot cling to the “dreamer” either. Just as the figments of the dream have no real reality, the “dreamer” only exists intentionally (in the phenomenological sense of the word), that is, as the foundation of dreams. Thus, the emptying of emptiness

³⁷ WTZ9, 476. かかる「空なる場所」としての識こそ、自ら転じて一切の種子となるところの、真実無性たる識である。「空」はしかし「空ずること」にほかならぬがゆえに、おのれを空じて有となる。すなわち識は種子識となる。

³⁸ Ibid., 477. しかし瑜伽行哲学は初めかかる識が独立してありそれが後に差別の法として転変し来ると説くのではない。...ここにおいて識は、差別的なる法を可能ならしむる根源であるとともに、またそれ自身差別的なる法によって可能ならしめられるのである。言い換えれば、無差別は差別を可能ならしめるとともにまた差別なくしては立ち得ない。これ空とはそれ自身をさえ空ずることであるという同一事である。

not only gives rise to discriminate dharmas, but it means that we cannot hold on to emptiness either.

Thus, while Watsuji's reading of Yogācāra is unlikely to ring true to Buddhologists who are aware of the broad array of Yogācāra literature and its hermeneutics, Watsuji's reading of it fulfills his own desired function by providing a striking image of the emptiness and unity of all things in dharmic "mind" that shows the ungraspability of all reality, dharmas, and even emptiness itself. It also shows the reverse movement, from nothingness, to the seeds of consciousness, to the myriad dharmas, and hence, reality, highlighting the two-way movement of discriminateness and non-discriminateness, as well as their *two-way dependency*.

Recapitulation

In Watsuji's view of Nāgārjuna's and Vasubandhu's philosophies, he maintains the basic views on no-self, dependent arising, and morality that he raised in his reading of primitive Buddhism. The only change that happens with his Mahāyāna is that the notion of emptiness is developed thoroughly—as the movement sublating discriminate dharmas in Nāgārjuna, and developing the return from emptiness to the myriad dharmas in Vasubandhu. Nowhere in his Mahāyāna view does he shift to an acceptance of everyday reality as it is. Watsuji maintains a thoroughgoing critique of the illusion of self that arises from the natural standpoint, and continuously radicalizes the idea of emptiness in order to effect this critique.

Thus, we see that Watsuji's Buddhist ethics is consistently centered around a view of dharmas as empty. All phenomena in the everyday world are constructed from dharmas.

But these dharmas are founded in emptiness—they only exist in their reciprocal determination. And, even emptiness is empty—it is no more than the emptiness of dharmas. Buddhist ethics is the practical philosophy of realizing these dharmas and their emptiness.

This consistency across Watsuji's readings of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna *Buddhisms* demonstrates that his view of Buddhism is not necessarily faithful to the doctrine or the historical practices of various forms of Buddhism. Rather, it is best seen as a form of modern Buddhism, deeply inspired by phenomenology and dialectics, and largely peculiar to Watsuji himself.

4 Philosophical Buddhism in Systematic Ethics

Watsuji's systematic ethics has two main elements which clearly connect his Buddhist work: non-duality and the movement of negation. As we shall see, both of these features are clearly influenced not only by Buddhism but by Hegel as well. Let us examine these further.

4.1 Non-Duality and Negation

In Watsuji's Buddhist theory, we see that *non-duality* plays a key role in his attempt to seize at the true nature of our experience. Non-duality here refers to the interdependence and mutual constitution of "poles" that are opposed to each other, where each pole is irreducible to, but inseparable from the other. There are two main axes of non-duality I would like to focus on here.

The first is the non-duality of subject and object. We see this in Watsuji's *Dharma-theorie* as an attempt to take the middle ground between naïve realism (objects as real) and transcendental metaphysics (only subject as real). Thus, he asserts dharmas as prior

to the duality of subject and object. This is also seen in the equiprimordiality of name-form and consciousness in his theory of dependent arising. This is further stressed in his approach to the emptiness of “eyes and form” in Nāgārjuna (in other words, the non-duality of the seer and the seen or the knower and the known), and in his refutation of the idealist reading of Yogācāra Buddhism.

This non-duality of subject and object is maintained and developed throughout the entire systematic ethics. In *Milieu*, Watsuji first brings up the unity of subject and object through intentional consciousness, wherein consciousness is always tied to what it is conscious of, and objects exist only in their being real to experience. (See our discussion in Chapter I.) However, he had not yet used the word “emptiness” to indicate this relationship, but only uses “absolute negativity.”³⁹

In *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, Watsuji first brings up the idea of absolute emptiness, this time in relation to idealism and materialism:

The study of *ningen sonzai* must be grasped as the foundation (*jiban*) of all the ideal (*kannenteki*) matters in human existence, and, at the same time, the foundation of all natural (*shizenteki*) being. . . . However, as subjective (*shutaiteki*) *sonzai*, that is persistently practical and active, and is not yet being or consciousness. *Sonzai* of this sort is truly *sonzai* through the movement of becoming totality (*zen*) through being individual (*ko*). Therefore, the foundation from which this movement arises is absolute emptiness (*zettai kū*).⁴⁰

As we see here, the standpoint of *ningen sonzai* that Watsuji takes as his starting point is prior to the distinction of the subjective and the objective, the ideal and the material, what

³⁹ Watsuji, *Fūdo*, 20 (12).

⁴⁰ WTZ9, 35. 人間存在の学は人間存在のすべて観念的なものの地盤たるとともにまた自然的なる有の地盤たるものとして把握しなくてはならない。…が、主体的存在としてはそれはあくまでも実践的行為的であって、いまだ有でもなければ意識でもない。このような存在は、個であることを通じて全となるという運動においてまさに存在なのであり、従ってかかる運動の生起する地盤は絶対空である。

ought to be and what is. (The third manifestation of this, is-ought, is a complex matter that we will return to later.) His long excursus into the history of western ethical thought focused on retrieving a view of the human that combined both the human being as knower (as is stressed by Hermann Cohen and Georg Hegel) and as the known—tied to the world of sensuous, objective, and material things (particularly in Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx).

In the three-volume *Ethics*, we see this develop as a notion of the individual as a “subjective body” connected to others through “practical interconnections through acts”—two concepts that clearly combine subjectivity and objectivity. This, in turn, allows the connection of relations to space and time, to relational media (that ensure the objective character of subjective relations), and most famously the notion of milieu (which highlights the mutual inseparability of the human/artificial and the natural). All these developments of the non-duality of subject and object are rooted in Watsuji’s Buddhist theory.

The second axis of non-duality, which we have briefly seen above, is that of individuality and totality. As his Buddhist theory was largely *phenomenological* and thus concerned with individual experience, this axis of non-duality did not clearly emerge in his earlier Buddhist work. However, as is hinted in the previous block quote, in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, Watsuji was quick to connect the notion of discrimination and non-discrimination (of dharma) to the individuality and totality (or communality) of human beings. We will examine this in greater depth in the next subsection.

These two axes of non-duality operate through the idea of *negation* (and correlatively, absolute negation or emptiness). In the systematic ethics, just as in the *Dharma-theorie*, the notion of negation and emptiness continue to be the key terminology for the

process of undoing the imagined separateness and self-subsistence of mind and body, self and other, individual and totality, culture and geography, and so on. This is most apparent in his discussion of the “negative dual-structure of *ningen sonzai*,” where he examines everyday life and shows how both individuality and communality are “empty,” devoid of self-existence, and existing only as negations of each other. Thus, emptiness continues to play its Nāgārjunian role of uniting all things in their mutual dependence on each other.

4.2 Hegelian Buddhism

However, Watsuji’s Buddhism is as Hegelian as his Hegel is Buddhist. So perhaps it is timely to examine Hegel in some depth here. Hegel is the most extensively discussed philosopher in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, and Watsuji sees Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life, *jinrin*) as the return of a strong idea of community that, while dominant until Aristotle, had been eclipsed by a largely individualistic philosophy of human existence. In his discussion of Hegel’s *System der Sittlichkeit, Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts*, and *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, two main ideas emerge that become central in the systematic works.

The first of these ideas is that of “Absolute *Sittlichkeit*” (*zettaiteki jinrin*), which Watsuji describes as follows:

The system of *Sittlichkeit* tries to cognize the ideal of absolute *Sittlichkeit*. The ideal of absolute *Sittlichkeit* tries to return absolute reality (*jitsuzaisei*) (a non-discriminateness that includes discriminateness) within itself as a unity. This unity thus returned—non-discriminateness that includes discriminateness—is none other than absolute totality. *Sittlichkeit* is this *totality of life*, this *original reality* (*honrai no genjitsusei*).

This includes all the moments of existence, unifying the particular and the universal, the subject and the object.⁴¹

Thus, we see here that Hegel's project of recapturing *Sittlichkeit* as an absolute totality that is a "non-discriminateness that includes discriminateness" is structurally identical with Watsuji's reading of the Buddhist project that begins with dependent arising and culminates with Nāgārjuna's notion of emptiness.

Second is Hegel's idea of sublation (*aufhebung*):

However, non-discriminateness—absolute totality—is not something that has excluded discrimination, but ought to be something that includes discriminateness within absolute universality, that is, something that sublates discriminateness. Therefore, negating discriminateness, that is the principle of the first stage, grounds going beyond this first stage. If this negation or destruction were purely negative, discriminateness would be maintained as an ideal determination (*kannenteki gentei*) but it would be destroyed in reality (*jitsuzaiteki*). . . . However, true sublation cannot be like this. Absolute *Sittlichkeit* destroys discriminateness as ideal determination (that is, as conflict), but allows the essence of discriminateness to exist. In other words, negation does not become fixed, and real discrimination is unified within the absolute being. The former is a negative sublation, and the latter is an affirmative or absolute sublation.⁴²

Here, Watsuji describes the dialectic ascent into the absolute through a sublation that does not destroy but that unifies and maintains difference within higher forms of unity. This is very similar to the dialectic descent into nothingness in *engi*, particularly his redefinition

⁴¹ Ibid., 77. 人倫の体系は絶対的人倫の理念を認識しようとする。絶対的人倫の理念とは、絶対的実在性（差別を含んだ無差別）をば、統一としてのおのれの内に取り戻すことである。かく取り戻された統一、すなわち差別を含んだ無差別は、絶対的全体性に他ならぬ。人倫とはかかる生の全体性、本来の現実性である。それは存在のあらゆる契機を含み、特殊と普遍、主観と客観を合一する。

⁴² Ibid., 82-83. しかし無差別すなわち絶対的全体性は、差別を閉め出したものではなくして、差別を絶対的普遍性の内に取り込んだもの、すなわち差別を止揚したものでなくてはならぬ。そこで第一段階の原理たる差別を否定することが第一段階を超えしむるゆえんとなる。ところでこの否定あるいは破壊が純粹に否定的であるならば、差別は観念的限定として保持されつつ実在的に破壊せられる。…しかし真の止揚はそうであってはならない。絶対的人倫は差別を観念的な限定として（すなわち対立として）は破壊するが、しかし差別の本質は存立させておく。すなわち否定は固定されず、実在的な差別が絶対者の中に合一する。前者は否定的な止揚であり後者は肯定的あるいは絶対的な止揚である。

of extinguishing (Watsuji 1963, 120), which he carries over to his reading of Nāgārjuna. And interestingly, Watsuji also reads the opposite movement in Hegel: “Absolute *Sittlichkeit*’s totality expressing itself in the individual is the self-determination of totality, its negation.”⁴³ This thus shows both the emptying of all dharma into emptiness, and the self-emptying of emptiness to manifest dharmas and reality found in the reverse *engi*, as well as in Nāgārjuna and Yogācāra.

The Buddhist-Hegelian notions of emptiness (as absolute negativity and absolute totality) and sublation (as a negating that preserves difference) will continue to form the theoretical core of Watsuji’s work in the three volumes of *Ethics*.

5 Shifts and Dilemmas

Watsuji’s systematic ethics is Buddhist in the sense that it is heavily influenced by Watsuji’s own modern, Hegelian reading of Buddhist ethics. However, the shift from Buddhist ethics of self to a Buddhist-Hegelian ethics of communal life is by no means smooth. In the former, the focus is “phenomenological” in that it is centered on the experience of a (universal) subject. But, in the latter, Watsuji goes beyond the level of individual experience toward communal life. This shift results in various changes; I focus on three: First, Watsuji struggled to figure out how to position emptiness within the dialectics of individuality and totality. Second, Watsuji subtly shifted the meaning of “the unity of is and ought.” And third, these two changes point to a general methodological shift from a critical Buddhist phenomenology to a hermeneutics of everydayness.

⁴³ Ibid., 94. 絶対的人倫の全体性が個人において己れを表現するのは、全体性が己れを限定すること、すなわち否定することである。

5.1 Dialectics of Emptiness

First, as I have mentioned in Chapter III, the balance between individuality and totality as reflected in the “shape” of the movement of double-negation and the functions of individuality and totality (particularly surrounding social change) has shifted erratically, from the pre-war, to the wartime, to the post-war volumes of *Ethics*. This is something that directly involves the Buddhist influenced notion of emptiness.

Some of Watsuji’s dialectical models (between individuality and totality) place emptiness on the side of totality. In *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, emptiness is structurally placed in the following manner:

That is, as subjective existence, practical and active, [emptiness] is not yet being or consciousness. This sort of existence is truly existence in the movement of becoming totality (*zen*) by being individual. Therefore, the foundation that gives rise to this movement is absolute emptiness, absolute negation. Absolute negation negates itself and becomes individual, and further it negates the individual and returns to the whole, and this movement itself is the subjective *sonzai* of *ningen*.⁴⁴

Here, emptiness is taken to be synonymous with totality or communal ethical life, where individuals, while maintaining their difference, are sublated and relate with each other as one communal we. This is the same model that is used in the “three-stage” dialectical model in *Ethics I*, where one moves from fundamental emptiness (the unnegated totality), to individual existence, and then to social existence.⁴⁵ A more complex version of this is found in the various stages of *Sittlichkeit* in human organization, where one expresses

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35. 主体的存在としてはそれはあくまでも実践的行為的であって、いまだ有でもなければ意識でもない。このような存在は、個であることを通じて全となるという運動においてまさに存在なのであり、従ってかかる運動の生起する地盤は絶対空である。すなわち絶対的否定である。絶対的否定が己れを否定して個となりさらに個を否定して全体に還るという運動そのものが、人間の主体的な存在なのである。

⁴⁵ *WTZ10*, 123-124 (116-117).

negation and nothingness through the gradual ascent from the family to local communities, to cultural communities, and to the state. Watsuji first expresses this in a 1934 article entitled “Dialectical Theology and the Ethics of the State” (*Benshōhōteki shingaku to kokka no rinri*) which is part of *Person and Humanity*, showing the connection of this model to his Buddhist ideas.⁴⁶ He then details this further in *Ethics II*.

In all these dialectical models, a Buddhist transposition would be such that emptiness is equated with communal life, and the myriad dharmas are equated with individual people. Emptiness empties itself to give birth to the myriad dharmas (differentiated individuals) who then return to emptiness (*Sittlichkeit*) through negation. Individuals would thus represent ignorance, and the overcoming of individuality enlightenment. Thus, the whole Buddhist project of realizing the emptiness of dharmas becomes the attempt to realize the emptiness of individual existence and to return to the non-duality of self and other in *Sittlichkeit*.

Where does this particular model come from? I think it comes partially from Hegel himself, who sees absolute *Sittlichkeit* as absolute ethnos. Watsuji eventually finds scientific backing for this idea in *Ethics II*, where he discusses Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and shows that the idea of the absolute, of divinity, is anthropologically rooted in the experience of totality, whose power is infinite in comparison to the single human person.⁴⁷

However, as we have seen in Chapters II and III, these totality-centered dialectical models are not compatible with the other ways Watsuji himself discusses dialectics. This

⁴⁶ WTZ9, 460.

⁴⁷ See Chapter IV, Section 3.2.

is most clear in *Ethics I*, where he sees both individuality and totality as empty, and sees their mutual and endless negation as the only way in which the negative movement of absolute negativity is expressed. In this model, both individuality and totality are merely discriminate dharmas, and emptiness is the ground that both unifies them and allows them to exist in their mutual negation.

Furthermore, this model is the only way to make sense of the times when Watsuji discusses emptiness as something that *individuates* and that allows the individual to negate totality.⁴⁸ In *Ethics I*, this appears several times—first in his discussion of Jesus Christ and Shakyamuni Buddha. Next, it appears in his critique of closed society. As the latter includes a perfect example of absolute totality as being outside of both individuality and totality, let me quote it again here:

Where an individual who revolted against a family or a state, finds himself based in the Absolute, then by what right can a family or a state, as finite wholes, demand the negation of this individual? Even the prosperity of the state, insofar as the state is but a finite group of human beings, is not given priority over the dignity of an individual who originates in the Absolute. Likewise, only when a state originates in the Absolute and the negative activity of absolute negativity renders individual obedience to the state possible can the state be justified in negating individuals.⁴⁹

Here, emptiness is depicted as a *principle* that allows for the ethical legitimacy of the rebellions of the individual or the coercions of the state, rather than as something that is already present in finite totalities just as they are. Similarly, in *Ethics II*, this dynamic can be seen in the interplay of cultural products and cultural production, and in *Ethics III*, this

⁴⁸ See Chapter II.

⁴⁹ WTZ10, 130 (123) 家族や国家から背き出た個人が、己れの根源を絶対者において自覚している場合、単に有限的な全体に過ぎない家族や国家が、いかなる権利によってその個人の否定を要求し得るであろうか。国家の存続繁栄というごときことも、その国家が単に有限な人間団体に過ぎない限り、絶対者に根ざせる個人の尊厳より重いものではない。国家自身が同じく絶対者に根ざせるものであり、個人の国家への服属が絶対否定性の否定的活動である時のみ、国家は正当に個人を否定し得るのである。

same dynamic of cultural creation is transposed to the very movement of human societies in history, where the free individual negates pre-existing totality and individuates *in order to realize how totality ought to be*. This negation clearly puts the individual in (selfless) tension with society, which sometimes results in the martyrdom of the leaders of social change. Thus, in the dialectical model of trying to realize unity-in-difference as presented in *Ethics III*, while emptiness is still equated with totality (in the sense of *Sittlichkeit*), it is always what finite totality is *not yet*.

If emptiness were merely on the side of totality, then realizing emptiness would make the individual one with society. But, in the above examples, we see that the individual's relationship with emptiness can pit the individual against the status quo of society, resulting in tension, but also possibly change and historical progress. Thus, individuality and totality are just equal dharmas here, and ethics is guided by the need to return to emptiness in a manner that negates the arising of egoism/self in either individuality or totality.

5.2 Between Is and Ought

A key issue in the positioning of emptiness is to what extent emptiness is seen as present in how reality really is, and to what extent it is seen as an ought to be realized. This is a central problem in the very idea of “ethics as a study of *ningen sonzai*.” Consider the following:

Ethics is the academic field that tries to elucidate human relationships, and consequently elucidates the order or reason that founds human communities. . . . What is

ningen? What is relationality? These are problems that immediately come up with the concepts of ethics and the study of it.⁵⁰

What we see here is what David Hume criticizes as the conflation of is and ought, of *Sein* and *Sollen*. Is there not a big difference between studying what *ningen* actually is and what principles guide what *ningen* ought to be? This conflation is found in *Ethics I* as well, where Watsuji abruptly shifts from an analysis of experience that shows that individuality and totality *are* empty and that each *exists* as a negation of the other, to a discussion of how individuality and totality *ought* to negate each other, saying: “Were we to deviate from this law, we would cease to exist.”⁵¹ If the laws of *ningen sonzai* were laws of existence, deviating from it would be impossible. That is possible only if they are principles of how *ningen* ought to be—but then, everyday expressions (such as those analyzed in order to reveal the fundamental emptiness of our existence) would not necessarily display a fidelity to these principles.

Watsuji defends this “conflation” by arguing:

When we speak of this, clearly *ningen sonzai* is not *Sein* (being) as opposed to what ought to be. Because *ningen*'s existence is *ningen*'s *act connections*; it is not the same as a possible object in nature like *Sein*. As praxis, it is always moving toward realizing what is yet to be realized. However, as *ningen*'s act connections, it is not the same as mere subjective consciousness of the ought.⁵²

⁵⁰ WTZ9, 13. 倫理学とは人間関係・従って人間の共同態の根底たる秩序・道理を明らかにしようとする学問である。…人間とは何であるか。間柄とは何であるか。それは倫理及び倫理学の概念から直ちに惹き起こされてくる問題なのである。

⁵¹ WTZ10, 125 (119). もしこの理法をはずれば人間存在は存在し得なくなる。

⁵² Ibid., 34 (34). かくいうとき、この人間存在は当為に対せしめられる *Sein* でないことはもう明らかであろう。人間存在は人間の行為的連関であるゆえに自然性において可能な客体の *Sein* ではない。それは行為として常にいまだ実現せられざることの実現に向かっている。が、またそれは人間の行為的連関として、単に主観的な当為の意識というときでもない。

In *Ethics I*, Watsuji illustrates this using the example of the trust (*shin* 信) between friends.⁵³ This sort of trust is an archetypal example of the law of *ningen sonzai* prior to the distinction between *Sein* and *Sollen*. If there were no trust to begin with, then the friendship would not even exist. So it is not merely an ought. But at the same time, people can stop trusting each other. Hence, it is not just a fact, but something that must continuously be carried out.

It is important to note that this is *very different* from the notion of emptiness as prior to is and ought as discussed in “The Founding of Morality” in Watsuji’s discussion of primitive Buddhism. There, he points out that the intermingling of fact and value, how we think things are and how we think they should be, are often on the level of the natural standpoint. In relation to this, the truth that phenomena *are phenomena*, despite being a principle of how things are (*Sein*), is *by no means apparent*. Ordinary foolish people do not even realize that reality is made up of non-dual *skandhas* or conditioned by various dharmas that give rise to the world of impermanence and suffering, much less realize the emptiness of all dharmas. The standpoint of realizing dharma (wisdom) and the standpoint of realizing the emptiness of dharmas (extinction) are so distant from the natural standpoint that it exists only as the call of a distant ought, whose justifications cannot even be proven in the natural standpoint.

In contrast to this, the idea of the unity of is and ought in his systematic ethics is often presented as the *functional laws* (in the sociological sense of “functionalism”) that allow relational human existence to continue as it is. These are *already present* in the natural standpoint so long as people are in relation with each other. They are thus not a

⁵³ Ibid., 13-14 (11-12).

standpoint that requires the radical inversion of everyday life, but a standpoint that only needs to be maintained within the ordinary. As evidence of this, Watsuji often speaks of deviation from this law as resulting in “the extinction of communal existence,” or in “*ningen sonzai* ceasing to exist.” However, can emptiness as a *functional law* that *sustains* communal existence ever be the ground for human authenticity,⁵⁴ for individuation, or for the critique of existing communal life?

5.3 Hermeneutics and Transcendence

What we see here is a clear conflict between Watsuji’s Buddhist ethics that is highly critical of everyday experience, and Watsuji’s ethical hermeneutics that affirms it. Watsuji’s shift from phenomenology to hermeneutics is primarily because of his realization of the primacy of relationality—that it is not merely a matter of the individual cognizing the other, but of the mutual interpenetration of I and thou that results in collective consciousness. Watsuji thus argues:

This phenomenological reduction is carried out under the presumption that the natural attitude (*shizenteki taido*) already proposes transcendent being (*chôetsu yû*) and thus takes a contemplative standpoint as its kernel. Therefore, it does not consider the unconscious, practical, and actional aspects in the natural attitude. . . . However, for hermeneutics, everyday life itself, as the practical and actional connection within the natural standpoint, is already the dynamic unfolding of expression and understanding in relationality.⁵⁵

In order to get to the standpoint of relational consciousness, Watsuji thus cannot criticize the natural attitude toward reality or bracket it the way phenomenology does, in order to

⁵⁴ Watsuji mentions authenticity in *Ibid.*, 142-143 (135).

⁵⁵ *WTZ9*, 176. この現象学的還元は自然的態度がすでに超越有の定立というごとき観照的態度を核心とするという前提の下に行われる。従って自然的態度における無意識的・実践的・行為的な側面は顧みられない。…しかし解釈学にとっては、自然的態度における日常生活そのものが、実践的行為的連関として、すでに間柄における表現・了解の動的発展である。

maintain the collective consciousness that is present in the natural attitude. This is in stark contrast to Watsuji's continuous critique of the natural standpoint as the standpoint of the fool. Now it appears that the fool is far more in touch with his relationships than the sage.

Instead of phenomenological bracketing, Watsuji now suggests hermeneutic interpretation as a method:

Thus, the hermeneutic method as a method of ethics, consists in grasping the dynamic structure of *ningen's sonzai* through its most basic everyday expressions. *Ningen's sonzai*, in its everydayness, constantly manifests itself in the practical connections of life, expression, and understanding; and yet it does not become aware of this as expression. Hence, the effort to realize it as expression is a philosophical activity that assumes the form of a hermeneutic method.⁵⁶

In this method, one examines the everyday expressions of *ningen sonzai*—gestures, language, customs, tools, cultural products—and searches for the practical understanding that is *already* present within everyday life:

The practical interconnection of acts already contains a practical understanding within itself. And this means that betweenness itself is already a practical *wake*. Betweenness consists in the fact that self and other are divided from each other (*wake-rareru*) and, at the same time, that what is thus divided becomes unified. . . . Hence, betweenness, as the practical interconnection of acts, consists in a connection of unity/division/union. This is exactly practical *wake*.⁵⁷

If one is able to articulate the practical *wake* already included in the practical interconnection of acts, then the work of ethics in articulating the fundamental structure of *ningen sonzai* is complete. This is, of course, clearly the opposite of his constant suspicion toward everydayness in his Buddhist ethics.

⁵⁶ WTZ10, 47 (43). そこで倫理学の方法としての解釈学的方法は、最も日常的なる人間存在の表現を通じて人間存在の動的構造を把握するにある。日常的なる人間存在は、実践的な生・表現・了解の関連において絶えず己れを表現しつつ、しかもそれを表現としては自覚しておらない。従ってそれを表現として自覚することは、解釈学的方法として、一つの哲学的行動なのである。

⁵⁷ Ibid, 38 (35).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed Watsuji's view of Buddhist ethics, particularly focusing on the attaining of the standpoint of no-self through realizing dharma, and the realization of the emptiness of dharmas in dependent origination. The realization of these dharmas is wisdom, and this is brought to its fruition as the standpoint of extinguishing through the moral practices of Buddhism. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the foundation of all dharmas in emptiness was clarified through Watsuji's reading of Nāgārjuna, and the reverse movement from emptiness to the myriad dharmas was examined via Yogācāra Buddhism.

I have also shown how Watsuji's reading of Buddhism clearly influences his systematic ethics. This is particularly visible in the ideas of non-duality, which connects with Watsuji's *Dharmatheorie*, and of negation, which connects with *engi* and Mahāyāna Buddhism. These are, of course, lensed through the key Hegelian ideas of absolute *Sittlichkeit* and negation. However, I also argued that there are complications in the move from Buddhist ethics to a systematic ethics of *ningen sonzai*. These are seen in the shifting models of dialectics and the role of emptiness therein, in the shifting notion of the unity of is and ought, and in the difficulty in reconciling a critique of everydayness in Buddhism with the ethical hermeneutics of everyday life.

As such, returning to the questions I first raised, my response to the argument between Dilworth and LaFleur must remain ambiguous: I agree with LaFleur that the Buddhist idea of emptiness influences Watsuji's systematic ethics in ways that cannot be ignored. Watsuji's systematics is Buddhist, at least in the modern sense of Buddhism. But, at the same time, I must agree with Dilworth that Watsuji's shift to more socially oriented

methods confounded this Buddhist grounding, resulting in an ethical system that cannot be completely resolved with Buddhism—not even Watsuji’s own view of it.

Chapter VI. Transcendence and Everydayness in Buddhist-Hermeneutic Ethics

In the previous chapter, we have examined Watsuji's view of Buddhist ethics and its connection to his systematic (hermeneutic ethics). What we have seen is that while there are clear connections between the two, there is a fundamental gap between them as well. Watsuji's Buddhist ethics sees everyday life as blind and filled with suffering, and therefore, requires that emptiness negate everydayness. But his hermeneutic ethics shows the need to go beyond the standpoint of individual experience and see the absolute as operating within everyday life. What is the significance of this gap? And might there be a way to bridge it? That is, is there an implicit Buddhist-hermeneutic ethics present within Watsuji that can combine the strengths of both? In this way, I hope to answer the three questions raised in the previous chapter: First, how ought we to understand the dialectic of individuality and totality in emptiness? Second, how ought we to conceive the unity of is and ought? And third, how ought we to reconcile transcendence and everydayness?

In this chapter, I will begin with an examination of the effects of the gap between Buddhist and hermeneutic ethics. I will then look to Watsuji's idea of culture as a "spiritual community" and how it might function as a bridge for Buddhism and hermeneutics. Then, using this as a model, I will suggest a possible way of reassembling a Buddhist-hermeneutic ethics. Finally, I will examine how Watsuji's ideas might contribute to the

contemporary discourse on Japanese Buddhism and ethics. In particular, I will try to respond to Christopher Ives' notion of Zen Social Ethics and James Mark Shields' notion of dharmic materialism.

1 Minding the Gap between Buddhism and Hermeneutics

One of the key points of the previous chapter was to highlight the gap between Watsuji's earlier Buddhist works and his later hermeneutic ethics. While I agree with William LaFleur and Nagami Isamu that it is necessary to examine the Buddhist influences on Watsuji's thought, I take issue with their statements that "Watsuji is . . . a remarkably consistent thinker, one for whom ethics and aesthetics are both informed by similar [Buddhist] structures of thought and types of analysis,"¹ or that "Based on the specifically Buddhist philosophy of *kû*, he attempted to develop a notion of ethics."² In such a reading that sees Watsuji's hermeneutic ethics as cleanly continuous with his early Buddhist ethics, it would be as if the emptying of ego automatically opened up to one's flourishing as a member of a family or culture. It would be as if the hermeneutic awareness of the pre-existing practical demands of society were equivalent to the critical unmasking of the world of phenomena and the interrelated dharmas that constitute it.

Such a reading would be academically inaccurate, for it would miss the tension that Watsuji himself sees (albeit inconsistently) in the process of awakening and in society. It would also miss Watsuji's bewilderment as to how to understand emptiness as both a concealed mystery and at the same time, as the most given of givens in everyday life. But

¹ LaFleur, "Buddhist Emptiness," 250.

² Nagami, 279.

more than that, such a reading would be politically dangerous, for it would lead to the very schema that Brian Victoria and Ichikawa Hakugen decry—where enlightenment empties people of criticality and makes them harmonize with even the most dangerous of social configurations.

Of course, this is an easy mistake to make. As we will examine further on, most modern Buddhist (especially Mahāyāna-inspired) approaches to social ethics take a stance of “universal awakening,” where enlightenment unifies the individual with all humankind (and all creation). Thus, it is tempting to see Watsuji as doing the same with his Buddhist-loaded social ethics. However, if one recalls that Watsuji’s social ethics is concerned not with a *universal community*, but with finite and exclusive communities, we see that the connection here *must* be a difficult one—just as modern Buddhists struggle with the question of how an “enlightened member of universal community” should engage finite communities (like families, social classes and nation-states).

I will return to the problem of universal awakening vs. awakening to finite totality at the end of the chapter. For now, all that is necessary is to note that the relationship between individual enlightenment and the social ethics of *finite* totalities is a difficult one. And this difficulty, as we have seen last chapter, has resulted in a theoretical gap, if not an outright clash, between Watsuji’s Buddhist ethics and his systematic/hermeneutic ethical project. This difference is merely *masked* by the shared use of terms like emptiness, negation and non-duality—it is by no means resolved.

1.1 The Dangers of One-Sidedness

However, if we examine each side of this gap, we will find that both sides have their dangers. For instance, what would happen if we merely take Watsuji's "new" systematic ethics as the completed form of the ethics of emptiness?

As we have seen in previous chapters, Watsuji's systematic ethics is ambivalent on the balance between individuality and totality. But compared to his Buddhist ethics, we can see three tendencies in the systematic ethics that can be problematized. First, Watsuji tended to place emptiness on the side of totality. This results in an absolutization of totality as the womb that founds all of *ningen sonzai*. In this sort of schema, the individual would exist merely as a manifestation of "ignorance," a negative moment that emptiness/totality passes on the way to its self-realization. Even if emptiness/totality empties itself to realize individuals, individuals remain merely secondary to the whole. Compared to his early Buddhist ethics where the individual was the very locus of enlightenment, his hermeneutics no longer places much value on the individual, significantly weakening the ideological supports of social critique and individuation.

Second, the hermeneutic approach tends to see the ought as *given* within relational contexts. Thus, ethics only has to delve into the demands (*wake*) of already existing practical linkages of acts in order to arrive at the emptiness it seeks. However, is emptiness really immediately present in practical act connections? For instance, in the case of a closed society, or in the case of a stagnant cultural community, it can be argued that the "wake" within the practical linkages—the pre-conscious collective demands of the status quo—perpetuate the stasis that causes the community's stagnation. In the case of the innovator or the "prophet" that Watsuji discusses in *Ethics II/III*, is a hermeneutics into the *already existing* interconnections of society sufficient in order to breathe new life into culture and lead totality to its heretofore unrecognized forms? The strong sense of critique

in the Buddhist ethics seems to almost disappear in the purported hermeneutic method of the systematic ethics, making the process of social critique and change very difficult to conceptually express.

Third, the hermeneutic approach tends to see emptiness as manifest in *all forms of finite totality*, making no distinction between “ethical” and “unethical” communities.

As Nishitani Kei says,

However, so long as *jinrin* is relation or companionship (*nakama*), then, as Kaneko [Takezô] points out, there is no change [in the fact that] visiting one’s mistress is relation, or that a band of robbers is companionship. In order to explain the unethicality of these, we have to accept, not a lack of *jinrin*, but a lack of values.³

This “anthropological/sociological neutrality” would make ethical judgment very difficult. And the realization of the “emptiness” of totality and the return to individuality may not be enough in situations where the very community itself (and not merely the stagnation in it) is ethically problematic.

Thus, not only does the shift to hermeneutics tend to absolutize totalities and diminish individuality, it tends to make critique and social change impossible, turning it into an ethics of the collective status quo. The strong individuality and critique of everydayness of Watsuji’s earlier Buddhist ethics would not have fallen into these problems. In a sense, one might even say that a lot of the criticisms against Watsuji are a direct result of his abandoning his Buddhist ethics in favor of this hermeneutic approach. Perhaps Watsuji would have been better off sticking with his original idea?

³ Nishitani, 34. しかしながら人倫が間柄であり、仲間であるかぎり、金子が指摘するように、妾通いも間柄であり、泥棒仲間も仲間であることに変わりがない。その反倫理性を説明するためには人倫の欠如ではなく、価値の欠如を認めなければならない。

On the other hand, viewed from the side of Watsuji's later ethics, there are clear limitations to his earlier Buddhist program. First is, as it stands, it is hopelessly individualist. It is concerned with the suffering, ignorance, and liberation of the individual subject. While he discusses the salvation of others in "The Foundation of Morality," is this really a *social* ethics?

The following ideal—"Even if Buddha is seen as the archetypal incarnation of the ideal, in this archetype, it is not only [Buddha's] own truth that is enlightened, but *through this truth, all must be changed*"—is necessarily included [in liberation]. Liberation is not within the *self as opposed to others* alone, but has to be realized generally (*ippanteki*).⁴

While Watsuji does recognize the importance of praxis (particularly "right livelihood"), thus seeing some practical sociality to his Buddhist ethics, it is arguably still primarily concerned with the salvation of the "universal/general subject," without directly addressing the *actual* suffering of *actual* others. Furthermore, while there might be a notion of compassion toward others in general, this model of ethics does not consider finite totalities and the finite roles we play within them in the concretization of compassion. Nor does it involve social levels of suffering (as is found not in individual but in systemic injustice), misinformation, and liberation (justice). Thus, Watsuji's critique of individualist ethics in the beginning of *Ethics I* applies to his own Buddhist ethics just as much as it applies to Immanuel Kant.

Moreover, his original Buddhist ethics completely rejected everyday life. The world of phenomena—the subjective meaningfulness rooted in the objective world—is,

⁴ WTZ19, 142. 「仏が理想の具現者の典型と見られるとしても、この典型においては、自ら真理を悟れるのみならず、この真理によって他を化せねばならぬ」との理想が必然のものとして含まれている。解脱は他に対する自己においてのみならず、一般的に実現されねばならない。

as in the first two noble truths, rooted in ignorance and thus gives rise to primordial anguish. While Watsuji saw a liberation “in this world” through seeing everything in light of negation, it tends to shake off the very world that is shared by communities. This would be characteristic of a “Śramaṇic” (*shukke shugi*, renunciatory) view, but it would make any positive appraisal of communal life and culture impossible. While it is difficult to agree that truth is just sitting there within the actuality of everyday life, is it not equally implausible to condemn every single aspect of everyday life as being devoid of the truth of emptiness that is supposedly at its ground? Regardless of how we might answer these questions, one can conjecture that a total rejection of everyday life was something difficult for Watsuji to stomach, given his fondness for art and literature and his orientation as a “cultural anthropologist.”⁵

1.2 Bringing Back Criticality to Hermeneutic Ethics

What this makes clear is that first, Watsuji’s Buddhist and hermeneutic ethics are different, and second, that they both have weaknesses that are complemented by the strengths of the other.

Contrary to the weaknesses of the hermeneutic ethics previously examined, in Chapter II, we have seen that in some parts, Watsuji does try to maintain a sense of singularity within emptiness. The individual cannot merely be fodder for negation. Also, as we have seen in Chapter III, Watsuji tried to integrate a view of the individual (“the prophet”) as a source of social change that positively contributes to society. Thus, as we

⁵ This is seen in writings like *Pilgrimage to Ancient Temples in Nara* (1919), *Ancient Japanese Culture* (1920), and *Research on the History of the Spirit of Japan* (1926).

have seen in the previous chapter, emptiness can also be read as being neither-individuality-nor-totality, and the dialectic of emptiness can therefore balance both individuality and totality evenly. This would ensure that absolute negativity does not deify totality, but rather constantly negates the tendency of *ningen sonzai* to stagnate in either pole/dharma.

Examining the differences between the Buddhist ethics and the hermeneutic ethics, one finds that exactly in the points where the latter differs from the former—taking the emptiness as totality, taking the ought as given, uncritically accepting all totalities as manifesting emptiness—Watsuji loses the positive elements we have capitalized on and summarized in the previous paragraph. Conversely, might the strengths come from the overlap between the Buddhist ethics and the hermeneutic ethics? In response to this possibility, I wish to reframe Watsuji’s later ethics in light of his Buddhist ideas, and, in doing so, highlight the points that allow for a singular individual, social critique, and a balance between individuality and totality.

However, do these critical ideas fit in Watsuji’s idea of *hermeneutics* as the method of ethics? Does it fit with the notion of ethics as merely interpreting the practical act-connections in everyday life? Perhaps he is already adding something that is far more idealistic than the name “hermeneutics” might suggest.

One piece of evidence supporting the idea that hermeneutics *can* be critical is the idea of “states of privation” (*ketsujotai*).⁶ By states of privation, Watsuji is referring to expressions of *ningen sonzai* that are reflective of a need for self-overcoming. In other words, something *within* everyday existence itself can suggest that there is a need to go beyond how things are. These states of privation can thus be seen as the hermeneutic

⁶ Robert Carter translates *ketsujotai* as “modes of deficiency.”

equivalent of suffering (*ku*)—how the demand for realization manifests itself in everydayness. This would allow for a sense of social change that remains internal to the expressions of reality, without being reducible to individual will.

Watsuji first brings up this notion in the introductory chapter of *Ethics I*:

The closer the community of *sonzai*, the more “privacy” is intensified. Thus, on the one hand, “privacy” mediates the unity of social ethics, without thereby ceasing to be private. On the other, it prevents the truth inherent in *ningen* from emerging. This is the reason why *ningen sonzai* makes its appearance in a defective form of solidarity. Here, societies of mutual interest arise (*Gesellschaft*), or what could be called egoistically connected societies. These societies, although drawing lessons concerning communal structure from the community of *sonzai*, do not make *sonzai* communal. Here trust, sincerity, service, responsibility, obligation, and so forth are made use of formally but have no substance. That is to say, they are systems of social ethics, without thereby being socially ethical. For this reason, they can be called deprived forms of social ethics.⁷

Here, Watsuji brings up his greatest enemy—profit society—as an example of a community that is fundamentally “deprived,” or self-alienated from its own existence as community. In this case, society is merely a bundle of individuals, with no genuine belonging in communal existence.

In contrast, in another case, he argues that a society can become problematic by being too closed. In arguing that a state must overcome all private interest and be completely public, he writes, “This is not to deny that there are states that obviously exhibit ‘self’ (*watakushi*), because a state too can manifest as a state of privation of its real nature (*honshô*).”⁸ While Watsuji’s discussion of this case is unclear, I suggest that this is an “egoistic state” of a different sort, alienated, not in its lack of internal cohesion, but in its refusal to relate *externally*, by becoming a bully amongst other nation-states.

⁷ WTZ10, 29 (25).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 594. 顯著に「私」を発揮する国家があるという事実を否認するのではない。国家もまたその本性の欠如態において現われ得るからである。

Furthermore, states of privation also occur to individuals:

The independence of the individual is a mode of the deficiency (*ketsujotai*) of community. . . . What illustrates this most conspicuously is the phenomenon of ‘solitariness’. . . . This is the negation of community.

Paradoxically, she who has lost her family feels the being of her family the most strongly. . . . If the supposition is valid that solitariness, as a mode of deficiency, actually manifests that deficiency all the more robustly, then it becomes immediately evident why ‘solitariness’ possesses the same meaning as ‘loneliness’. Loneliness is a feeling of deficiency. . . . As a mode of being deficient in community, it rather shows that a human being does not desire an isolated and independent existence.⁹

It is our very suffering within the state of privation of solitariness, our very loneliness, which attests to the human need for relationship. There is no need for an external ideal or imperative of “relationality” in order to see the need for relation. Just as suffering reveals the need for enlightenment, states of privation reveal the need for self-overcoming of both the individual and the totality within the scope of hermeneutic ethics.

2 Bridging the Gap: Culture as Spiritual Community

2.1 Secret Ideals in Hermeneutics

Above, we have suggested that one might find the ought without looking beyond what is—that is, to find the ought through a hermeneutics of everydayness, and see it within our very experiences as individuals and our expressions as communities. However, there

⁹ Ibid., 86-87 (81-82). このことは個人の独立性が共同性の欠如態であることを意味する。...それを顕著に示しているものは「孤独」の現象であろう。人は己れの意志により、あるいは他人の意志により、あるいは運命の働きによって人間関係から脱出し、引き放され、「孤独」の境地に身を置くことができる。これは何らかの共同性の否定である。

しからば家族を失って孤独となったものは最も強くその家族的存在を感じずる者となるであろう。...このように孤独が欠如態として欠けたものをかえって強く現わすとすれば、第二に、「孤独」が「寂しさ」と同義であるゆえんは直ちに明らかとなるであろう。寂しさとは欠如感である。...それは共同性の欠如態として、人が孤立的独立的な存在を欲しないということを示している。

are difficulties involved in remaining purely within hermeneutics. The previous discussion of “states of privation” requires an ability to distinguish between “authentic” and “degenerate” forms of *ningen sonzai*. But are these criteria necessarily found *within* the expressions studied by hermeneutics? Perhaps one could turn to the experience of “suffering” in a state of privation. But do we not experience difficulties both in trying to let go of self (as in the suffering of a “prophet”) just as much as we do in isolation of egotism? (And there are joys in both egoism and enlightenment.)

Given these methodological problems, it seems that rather than a wholesale acceptance of all forms of individuation and communization, Watsuji seems to be focusing on *particular kinds* of individuation and commitment. In this selectivity, there is something beyond “objective” hermeneutics that Watsuji seems to be hesitant to admit.

I wish to argue that there is a particular kind of community that Watsuji focuses on, and his interpretations of “everyday life” tend to focus on a particular kind of communal life. As a result, there is also a particular kind of “individualization” that he interprets positively. If one notes, he is very quick to dismiss *Gesellschaft* societies and utilitarian groupings from the scope of expressions of *ningen sonzai*. Watsuji sees certain forms of society as *degenerate*—and the pleasures from these are viewed as merely forms of ignorance and irrelevant to hermeneutic ethics.

In other words, Watsuji’s hermeneutics is not a value-neutral hermeneutics like his alliance with sociology and anthropology might suggest. Or, more specifically, his is a “value-neutral” hermeneutics not of *actual* communal life, but of *ideal/idealized* communal life. What ideals hide behind Watsuji’s supposed acceptance of everydayness that

allow him to filter what kinds of everydayness are relevant?¹⁰ By highlighting these ideals, perhaps we can clarify the points where his later ethics overlaps with his earlier Buddhist project, and thus better ground the critical potential found in the *Watsuji-ron* of McCarthy, Maraldo, and others.

2.2 The Ideal of Spiritual Community

Where then might we find Watsuji's ideal of unalienated communal life? I argue that the key here is Watsuji's idea of cultural community (*bunkateki kyôdôtai*). In *Ethics II*, cultural community sits unobtrusively as merely one stage in the progression from the family to the state. It does not get any special treatment in *Ethics I* or *III* either. However, I think this unobtrusiveness is misleading. Rather, if we see cultural community as representing an ideal of "spiritual community" (*seishin kyôdôtai*)¹¹ that is central to Watsuji's ethical project and paradigmatic of all relations—not unexpected for a lover of culture shifting to systematic ethics—I think we will have a clearer grasp as to the directionality (or biases) of Watsuji's attempt at social science.

The first point I wish to argue is that for Watsuji, cultural community is *the* highest level of communal life. In *Ethics II* he writes:

Above, we have been able to stipulate, for the most part, the nation (*minzoku*) as a *spiritual community* (*seishin kyôdôtai*), and the *person* (*jinkaku*) as a member of the

¹⁰ However, while I think it is important to *foreground* the ideals behind a "social science" of ethics, it is important that we remember that, in a sense, this is a dishonesty that *all* forms of social science suffer from. For instance, Emile Durkheim's functional sociology presupposes that society is an organic whole that maintains itself through the functioning of its parts. More obviously, Karl Marx's "scientific" communism clearly aims at an ideal of how human beings ought to relate with each other. As evidenced by the clash in sociology between conflict theorists and functionalists, there is no value-free hermeneutics of communal life. Thus, while it is good to unmask these ideals, I do not think there is anything fundamentally wrong with having ideals.

¹¹ "Spiritual" here is not in the ordinary sense of the English word. Rather, *seishinteki* is closer to the German *geistliche* and is thus broader—including all "humanistic" connections (taking a hint from *Geisteswissenschaft*—humanities, or literally human/"spiritual" sciences).

nation. The inseparableness of these two most realistically express the inseparableness of the individual and total moments in finite human existence.¹²

Note that he refers here to the nation/ethnos (*minzoku*) as the cultural whole. The cultural community includes the entire territory of a state (*kokka*) united by a common language. As such, Watsuji's idea of the state, while sequentially "higher," that is, more public than the cultural community, its scope is the same. The only difference is that the state tries to order all the different levels of *sittliche* community within the nation in a self-conscious way. The people included in the nation as *kokumin* are, at least for Watsuji, the exact same people included within the nation as *minzoku*.

This is seconded in his critique of "the sundering of state and ethnos, therefore the split of the state's *totality and sacredness*."¹³ As I have mentioned in chapter I, Watsuji argues that the ethnic whole must be identical with the body of citizens of the state in order for there to be a genuine sense of rule. Of course, as we have mentioned, this is one of the most problematic points of Watsuji's theory of culture and the state. But, needless to say, it shows the centrality of the cultural whole in his view.

Furthermore, not only is culture the highest form of community, but all forms of human organization consciously lead up to the cultural whole. In the very beginning of his discussion of culture,¹⁴ we see the relationship of siblings as opening up the closed family through *friendship* in the sharing of *culture*. Similarly, (as is especially clear in *Ethics III*), the milieual community (*fûdoteki kyôdôtai*) is the spatial aspect of the nation,

¹² WTZ10, 591. 以上によって我々は精神共同体としての民族と、民族の一員としての人格をほぼ規定し得たと思う。この両者の相即こそ、有限なる人間存在において最も現実的に個人的・全体的両契機の相即を実現したものである。

¹³ Ibid., 607. 国家と民族との分離、従って国家の全体性と神聖性との分裂。

¹⁴ Ibid., 519-520.

and the various local communities make up a territory that is the spatial equivalent of the historical-cultural whole of the nation-state. Finally, even economics is (or ought to be) fundamentally culturally directed:

If one considers these things, we should not seek the trans-locality (*chôchiikisei*) of economic organizations in the abstractness of *homo economicus*, but [see it as] a *movement toward a trans-local cultural community*.¹⁵

Economics is merely the sharing between local communities that allows for the formation of a cultural whole across the national territory.

As such, it becomes possible to read the entire system of *sittliche* organizations as the development of culture: The family is the basic, but closed unity that begins to open up through the friendship of brothers and sisters that is potentially open to others. Families cooperate within a local community, which links up to other communities via economics. This linkage of milieus of local communities results in the territorial whole of the nation. The *conscious* side of this is the culture, which is the spiritual communion of the nation. And the state merely gives this national whole a sense of order and cohesion and protects it through governance.

This is not to *reduce* all forms of human organization to culture, but to show how Watsuji was thinking about the network of human relationships with the ethnos at its center. If we examine what he sees as part of this ethnos, we find that it provides the clearest view of the pattern of ethical life that Watsuji champions. In analyzing culture, Watsuji looks at art, scholarship, and religion (with language as the universal feature of these three). In this, he gives three main qualifications of what makes culture *culture*:

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 519. 以上のごとく見れば経済的組織の超地域性は「経済人」の抽象性のうちにその根拠を求めべきものではなく、実は超地域的な文化共同体への動向にほかならなかったのである。

First, cultural communities—in art, scholarship, and religion—must involve a direct and conscious return to the absolute. We have briefly discussed this in Chapters II and III, but let us examine the connections from a different angle here. For instance, art is guided by formless form (*katachi naki katachi*):

People must have within themselves an identical *formless form*. People cannot, of themselves, develop this into an *existing form*, but when an excellent author accomplishes this, one can become self-conscious (*jikaku*) of the formless form inside oneself within that realized form.¹⁶

Here, people are seen as united by formless form, which guides the creation of the form of form by artists. This allows people to connect through art, while giving art a sense of uniqueness and singularity.

What is this community of formless form? We must grasp this at the most foundational layer of human existence. Therein, humanity is originally one and transcends all distinctions (*sabetsu*). However, there, too, is the origin of all distinctions, and, at the same time, is all distinctions themselves. Because of this, human existence is, in its extreme, emptiness, and develops itself as a movement of return (*kirai*). Emptiness is the dynamic of emptying emptiness and becoming being (*yū*), and emptying being and returning to emptiness.¹⁷

This is the first time in the entire *Ethics II* that Watsuji returns to a discussion of emptiness and double negation, after an extended discussion of the unfolding of human organizations. Thus, it shows his re-emphasis of the idea of the absolute. This continues with scholarship/science (*gakumon*), which Watsuji sees as the individual/communal pursuit

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 543-544. 人々もまた自らの内に同一の形なき形を持っているのでなくてはならない。人々はそれを自ら発展せしめて有る形にすることはできないが、しかし一人の優れた作者がこの仕事をなし遂げてくれると、その実現された形において自らの内の形なき形を自覚し得るのである。

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 544. その形なき形の共同とは何であろうか。我々はそれを人間存在の根源的な層において捕まえるほかない。そこにおいて人間は本来的に一であり、一切の差別を超える。が、同時にそれは一切の差別の根源であり、また一切の差別そのものである。だから人間存在は究極において空でありながら帰來の運動として己れを展開する。空とは空を空じて有となり有を空じて空に帰るといふ動性そのものである。

of truth that is grounded in the universality of “that which is realized by the original communality of *ningen*.”¹⁸ Finally, in religion:

The movement of return is self-consciously realized (*jikaku*) as a “return.” In other words, the *directionality* (*hōkō*) that runs through the movement of human existence—that, despite aiming for the destination, eventually arrives where one began. Therefore, only in turning back to one’s origin can the telos be seen—this is grasped not as a concept but as emotion (*kandō*). . . . The ultimate origin of human existence is absolute totality, in other words, absolute negativity.¹⁹

Religion is thus the direct, self-conscious return to the absolute that is the origin and telos of human existence.

As one sees in this examination of Watsuji, culture is always *directly tied to realizing the absolute—emptiness*. Reading *Ethics II*, one gets the suspicion that Watsuji has conveniently forgotten the whole idea of emptiness and double-negation. That is, until one gets to his discussion of culture, where all the references to emptiness can be found. Art, science, and religion are all a return to the absolute, wherein the absolute finds expression as concrete manifestations of beauty, truth, and the religious One.

Second, this return to the absolute must clearly express the dialectic synthesis of individuality and totality. For instance, as we have seen above, as rooted in formless form, art is shared with the community. Art is communal. But, as an *expression* of formless form, art is singular and non-repeating. Similarly, in science, the research into the existing

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 556. 人間の本来的共同性の自覚せられたもの

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 560. ここに帰来の運動が「帰来」として自覚される。すなわち人間存在の動きを貫いている方向が、行く末を目ざしているに関わらず畢竟本に帰るのであるということ、従って根源をふりかえることにおいて究竟の目標が見えるのであるということ、それがここに概念として把握せられるのでなく感動において確保されるのである。...人間存在の究極の根源が絶対的全体性すなわち絶対的否定性である...

body of knowledge is deeply communal, but the pursuit of new answers is distinctly individualistic. Of course, after this, the individual is able to creatively contribute to the academic community.²⁰ Finally, in religion,

Religious activity, as a form of human existence, is first and foremost relational (*aidagarateki*). While it is said that a person stands before god in a thoroughly individual way, it is not the case that anyone relates with absoluteness on one's own from the start. Before him, the passion within the absolute already exists with a particular name and form.²¹

Thus, it is from this socially conditioned encounter with the absolute that one proceeds to one's own encounter with the absolute, and eventually recasts these individual realizations in a way that others can share. Here, far more than family or local community or economics, the dialectic relationship of individuality and totality is clear. As I have mentioned in Chapter III, it is in cultural community that the mechanism for social change is first described, and perhaps we see now that there is nothing accidental about that.

Third, cultural communities must be bound by the virtue of *friendship*. In his discussion of culture, Watsuji discusses friendship as the sharing in culture and cultural creation. Friendship is spiritual communion that unifies people from a broad range of filial and regional backgrounds.²² Furthermore, friendship is carried out through trust and truth: "I think we can understand why, from the beginning, the way of friends (*yûjin no michi*) has been particularly referred to as 'trust' (*shin*). Trust is 'truth (*makoto*)' (*shinjitsu*), and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 551.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 561. 宗教活動は人間存在の一樣態として何よりもまず間柄的である。人は徹底的に個人として神の前に立つと説かれているが、しかしいかなる人も自ら初めて絶対性へのかかわりに入り込むのではない。彼の前には絶対性における感動がすでに一定の名や形に形づけられて存在している。

²² *Ibid.*, 570-574.

also ‘taking as truth’ (reliance [*shinrai*]).”²³ It is important to note that in *Ethics I*, friendship was the example used for the unity of is and ought, and trust and truth were seen as the very guiding concepts for ethical activity and distinguishing good and evil. Thus, these core concepts of Watsuji’s ethical theory are made into the specific virtues of cultural community.

And so we see that culture is the central form of human organization for Watsuji. More than the family, the town, or the economic community, the cultural community clearly demonstrates his notion of double-negation and fidelity to emptiness. And the virtues of culture are the very virtues that Watsuji takes as the axis of his ethics. Thus, it is clear that for Watsuji, culture as spiritual community is the paradigmatic form of human relation, and that which guides how he sees human beings ought to relate with each other in ethical life.

That is not to say that Watsuji accepts all forms of culture as the center of ethical life. Toward the end of his discussion of culture, he criticizes modern schools as pawns of *Gesellschaft* and being entirely about profit, criticizes commercialized art as incapable of mediating spiritual community, and totally lambasts the religious community (*kyôdan*) as a hypocritical profit society more corrupted than any other cultural community.²⁴ This shows that he is not merely conducting a neutral anthropology of culture. Rather, he is idealizing a particular form of culture and disqualifying anything that lacks the traits mentioned above.

²³ *Ibid.*, 578. 我々は古来友人の道が特に「信」と呼ばれたゆえんを的確に理解し得ると思う。信は「まこと」（真実）でありまた「まこととすること」（信頼）である。

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 574-578.

2.3 A Prototype of Communal Enlightenment: *Renga*

There is a particular instance of spiritual community and cultural activity that I think greatly inspired Watsuji's systematic ethics. His discussion of this is not part of his systematic works, but can be found rather in an article on "Japanese Literary Arts and Buddhist Philosophy," which was published in 1935, between the publishing of the prequel and the first volume of *Ethics*, as part of *Continued Research on the History of Japanese Spirit*. It is placed under a very conspicuously entitled section, "The Practice of *Śūnyatā*." The example here is that of *renga*, the art of linked verse poetry.²⁵

In this article, Watsuji sees *renga* as a literary form under the spirit of Zen Buddhism. He writes, "[Zen's] philosophical speculation was practiced not contemplatively, but as a practical discipline, such that every moment, it pressed acutely on toward philosophical comprehension. Expressions in literary art functioned here exactly as a leading thread to connect the two extremes."²⁶ What we see here is that the literary expressions of Zen unify religion and scholarship (philosophy) in art and language. Zen literature thus single-handedly encompasses every single dimension of Watsuji's view of culture.

Under the Zen arts, Watsuji names Noh drama, gardening, tea ceremony, *sumi-e*, and *renga*. But the last is particularly special because it is a group creation. Let us examine his view of this at length:

Group creation will be possible only when the linking of one verse to another becomes, at the same time, a bond between one person and another. In this sense, the creation of a *renga* should, at the same time, be a realization of the communal state of man. However, the communion between man and man does not mean their becoming

²⁵ I was made aware of this by William R. LaFleur, "Buddhist Emptiness in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Watsuji Tetsurô," *Religious Studies* 14.2 (1978), 237-250.

²⁶ Watsuji Tetsurô, "Japanese Literary Arts and Buddhist Philosophy," trans. Hirano Umeyo, *The Eastern Buddhist* NS4.1 (1971), 110.

merely one. It is only through the fact that men are unique individuals that a cooperation between ‘man and man’ can be realized. That is, *renga* is possible only ‘after each individual has perfected himself.’ . . . A *renga* can be created organically only through the practical realization of dialectical unity of the individual and the whole by the composers. The saying, ‘the whole company has become one entity’ ([*ichiza ga sorou*] 一座が揃ふ), signifies such a dialectic unity. Therefore, if there are self-centered persons in the company, a certain ‘distortion’ will be felt and group spirit itself will not be produced. When there are people, who, lacking individuality, are influenced only by others’ suggestions, a certain ‘lack of power’ will be felt and creative enthusiasm will not appear. It is by means of attaining to Nothingness while each remains individual to the last, or in other words, by means of movements based on the great Void by persons, each of whom has attained his own fulfillment, that the company will be complete and interest for creativity will be roused.²⁷

Above, we see a perfect expression of all of Watsuji’s ideals surrounding culture as spiritual community. In linked verse, each member attains to emptiness—which both individualizes each and unifies all. In this unity, both individuality and totality enter a free dialectical relationship, creatively expressing formless form in the form of form, realizing the truth of *ningen sonzai*, and giving manifestation to the religious absolute in a community of friendship, trust and truth.²⁸

Furthermore, in *renga*, we see the practice of emptiness. “What makes the cooperation of composers possible is the existence of the principle of ‘the great Void’ at their basis. It will not fail to rid each individual of his subjective feeling, especially self-cen-

²⁷ Ibid., 112-113.

²⁸ As James Mark Shields has suggested in a personal correspondence, Watsuji takes an unexpected approach to the unity of individuality and totality: Rather than see individual and whole as immediately united in compassionate activity or in communal creativity, he maintains the tension of individual and whole, giving the impression of “individual first, before whole” and, at the same time, “the whole first, before individual.” Thus, individuality and totality seem to never be simultaneous, but rather, contradictorily precede each other. This is characteristic of the model of emptiness as “continuous negation.”

tered sensation and emotion which cut a person off from the necessary communal feeling.”²⁹ Through the practice of selflessness, we also see the fruits of this communal awakening, this sharing in true spiritual friendship: “An inexpressible joy is produced among the company by virtue of the harmony of temperament between the [members]. It is an aesthetic joy and also the joy of the idea that ‘self and others are one,’ and is, therefore, a religious ecstasy of being in the great Void.”³⁰

Reading Watsuji’s *renga* gives the impression that his very view of artistic creation, scholarly life, and religious community were all constructed under the image of linked verse. In it, we see *nirvāṇa* expressed not as solitary awakening, but as a communal, creative, and dynamic intermingling in emptiness.

A brief side note: Just as *renga* exposes Watsuji’s ideals, perhaps it also exposes his limitations. First, if one notices, *renga* (or at least Watsuji’s view of it) presumes harmony between the composers. Nobody is bickering, nobody is contesting another’s interpretations. This is tied to Watsuji’s obsession with harmony and discomfort with any forms of agonism or strife, seen in his view of language and husband-wife relations (as I have discussed in Chapter II). However, is spiritual unity necessarily so smooth and uncontested? As we have seen in Chapter III, in the postwar volume of *Ethics*, Watsuji had to contend with the contestedness of historical change—how the very prophet who awakens to the form of how society ought to be (a form latent within society itself) is often martyred by the society he is committed to. So perhaps, *renga* reveals Watsuji’s bias—his fear of conflict and craving for harmony.

²⁹ Watsuji, “Japanese Literary Arts,” 114.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, *renga* is culturally particular. It is steeped in Japanese culture (and its Chinese influences) in a particular historical period and amidst a particular (elite) class of society. There are other forms of “collaborative art”—jazz improvisation, improvised comedic theater, combative rapping. Needless to say, they do not demonstrate the same harmonious characteristics of *renga*, despite arguably reflecting the same essence of creative dialectical unity of I and thou. As such, in using the image of *renga* as the model of all cultural life, was Watsuji not imposing a historically and milieuually particular form of community as a universal? Is he not ignoring other “discursive forms” of community? This is, of course, as we have discussed in Chapter IV.

3 Buddhist-Hermeneutic Ethics

Above, we have seen that, despite the totalizing and conservative elements in the hermeneutic ethics, it retains some elements that are similar to Watsuji’s Buddhist critique of everyday life. We see this in the idea of “states of privation,” which is still arguably within hermeneutics proper. But we also saw this in his tendency to highlight an idealized form of social life—a “selective hermeneutics” that perhaps transgresses the bounds of his own proposed method. These points of overlap are not explicitly foregrounded in the *Ethics*. Rather, they hover between his two contradicting projects, masked by the power-word “emptiness.”

However, careful analysis reveals that emptiness has multiple facets: First, emptiness is a *mysterious ultimate truth* that is hidden behind all the dharmas, which are, in turn, hidden behind all phenomena. While it is always operating in the world of phenomena, it is impossible for the ordinary person to see. Rather, this mystery must be unveiled

through individual wisdom and praxis, which breaks past the very construction of phenomena. Second, emptiness is the *principle* of negation in *ningen sonzai* that operates in *any* relational situation, whether we are aware of it or not. Third, emptiness is the *given fact* that is already present and practically understood in communal life. These only need to be made explicit by ethics. And fourth, emptiness is the *ideal* of self-aware negation. (We might add a fifth—emptiness as an *ideology* of Japanese supremacy in its mystical wisdom. We shall set this aside for the time being.)

Watsuji's Buddhist ethics focuses on the first (mysterious ultimate truth) and fourth, at the expense of the second and third. His hermeneutic ethics focuses on the second and the third, at the expense of the first and the fourth.

However, given the overlaps we have seen between the projects, I think it is possible to construct a *Buddhist-hermeneutic model* of Watsuji's ethics. Rather than merely using the word "emptiness" as a way of preserving the link between these two projects (as Watsuji does), I suggest connecting his two projects using these overlaps, stressing the ideals and judgments that run to the very limit of his hermeneutic method. In such a model, emptiness would be understood primarily in the second (principle) and the *fourth* senses (ideal), rather than the first (which is too individualistic) and the third (which would be a completely acritical "neutral" hermeneutics).

In this Buddhist-hermeneutic model, emptiness does function as a principle in any relationship (for there is a mutual determination of individuals and the whole even in a tyranny or in a case of gang rape). However, in many/most forms of relational life, this negative dual-structure is *denied*, and it manifests itself in a state of privation (where the individual pretends that he/she is not related to the totality, or where people pretend that the totality is independent of its members). The self-aware realization of emptiness, where

people live in the reality of and *in the spirit of* emptiness, can only occur in certain *ideal forms* of community—where the community is directly focused on the realization of emptiness, where the dialectic of individuals and totality flows unimpeded, and where people are bound by spiritual friendship. That is to say, the realization of the *principle* of emptiness demands the practical transformation of community toward the *ideal* of emptiness in spiritual community.³¹

This *possible* reading of Watsuji can be seen as bringing to the fore the “four noble truths” of *ningen sonzai*: First, that suffering is present in states of privation where the individual suffers and where institutions perpetuate suffering. Second, that this suffering comes from stagnation in the movement of double-negation due to individual or communal egoism. Third, that it is possible to enjoy the fruits of emptiness in true spiritual *Sittlichkeit*. And fourth, that the way to this ideal is through the path of ethics in which one realizes individual and communal suffering and egoity, and their negation through truthful responses to trust.

Let us examine this reframing further.

3.1 Dharmatheorie and Ningentheorie

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Watsuji’s Buddhism is a *Dharmatheorie*—it seeks to understand the categories of non-dual experience and their emptiness, for the soteriological purpose of relinquishing any attachment to self and substantiality. Perhaps identically, we can read Watsuji’s ethics “as a study of *ningen*” as a *Ningentheorie* that

³¹ We will see later, in our discussion of Shields, that this unity of changes in consciousness and changes in social structure are very close to the ideas of Karl Marx, especially in his early period. As I have discussed in Chapter I, this connection must not be overlooked despite Watsuji’s general disdain for Marxism.

seeks to understand the categories of non-dual “experience” and their emptiness. However, “experience” here can no longer be in the phenomenological sense of an individual’s experience or the abstract experience of a “universal subject.” Rather, experience must be shared, but at the same time, be concrete. For this, we see Watsuji turn to the expressions of *ningen sonzai*.³²

In examining the structure of *ningen sonzai*, Watsuji highlights several structural components: individuality, totality, spatiality, temporality, privateness, publicness, historicity and milieuity (in order of appearance in *Ethics*). If we notice, each expression of human existence in everyday life (like a greeting, or a product sold on the market) can thus be seen as a bundle of all these structures, much like in the theory of five *skandhas* (*goun*).

However, how do these structures relate to each other? I think the primary “dharma” here are individuality and totality, which form the first axis, and subjectivity and objectivity, which form the second axis. Subjectivity and objectivity exist in negating each other, but at the same time, are mutually dependent on each other. Their contradictory unity is necessary to grasp the noetic-noematic character of human existence. Similarly, individuality and totality are mutually negating and mutually dependent. These two axes overlay on each other, such that the subjective-objective realities are both individual and shared as well. This overlay is clearly manifest in the notion of practical interconnections through acts, which necessarily involves objectivity (acts, media, bodies in relation)

³² This approach resonates with Morimura Osamu’s view in “Shintaika sareta ‘kea no rin-rigaku’,” where he argues the importance of seeing Watsuji’s ethics as *ontologische* rather than merely *ontisch*. In such an *Ontologie* of the reality of *ningen*, the emptiness of all expressions (realities) and thus the authenticity of a non-attached attitude toward these would come to the fore.

and subjectivity (practical conditions or *wake*, hermeneutic significance), as well as individuals (relating actors) and communities (relations that situate actors).

From the subjective-objective relationship of individuality and totality arise spatiality and temporality, which are part of the relational topography and connections. These develop into milieu and history by extending one's optic of spatiality and temporality as it is shared across higher networks of relation. Finally, privacy and publicness have to do with the lensing character of totalities, where smaller totalities relate to produce larger totalities, and so forth, with relative levels of privacy and publicness.

Given this schema, how are we to understand emptiness? I suggest that, while Watsuji himself often uses his Nāgārjunian definition of emptiness as the “the non-discrimination of discrimination” to refer to individual persons as if they were “dharma,” this view would make it impossible to schematize “state egoism” and other communal states of privation. Thus, rather than individuals as dharmas, I think it is more useful for this reading to see dharmas as the structures of *ningen sonzai* I have listed above, particularly the two axes of individuality vs. totality and subjectivity vs. objectivity, where emptiness is their mutual negation and the *movement* of their relation. This is closer to Tanabe Hajime's usage of nothingness than Nishida Kitarō's, who tends to emphasize nothingness as a locus.³³

Ignorance (*avidya*) of the emptiness of the dharmas of *ningen sonzai* results in substantialization and various forms of egoism—particularly individualism and various forms of communal egoism (closed families, closed cultures, egoistic nation-states, etc.). All these egoisms are criticized by Watsuji, and, while his focus is on the individual's

³³ Cestari, “The Individual and Individualism in Nishida and Tanabe,” 62.

egoism, the subject of ignorance is, of course, not limited to the individual subject but includes all of *ningen sonzai*—both individual and communal subjects.³⁴

Watsuji sees these egoisms as causing “states of privation,” which can be seen as suffering on both an individual and an institutional level. Similarly, the practice of eradicating this suffering and attachment must occur, not merely on the individual, but on the communal level as well. Here, we must note that, because of the core idea of the dual-negative structure of individuality and totality, the negation of individual ego is *always through realizing finite totality*. Conversely, the negation of the ego of the community is always through realizing the individuality of its members. (In the case of a private community like a family, the negation goes both ways—toward members and toward more public totalities.) It is not a “breaking open of the self to a universal union,” but rather one, that always passes finite totalities. This is essential to Watsuji’s reading of Buddhist emptying. As such, rather than merely “selflessness” or “self-emptying,” it is easier to see the bi-directionality of praxis in Watsuji’s notion of *responding to trust in truth*.

3.2 Trust and Truthfulness

In the previous chapter, we have seen how trust was used to unify is and ought: Trust is something that both is and ought to be dynamically realized. Friends would not be friends without trust, but at the same time, they must continuously realize trust in order for their friendship to persevere. I described this as a “functional” view of trust. In *Ethics I*, Watsuji

³⁴ Although Watsuji does not stress this in *Ethics*, we see in *Milieu* that there are also forms of “egoism” that arise from overemphasis of the subjective pole (subjectivism; an ignorance of the influence of milieu and the givenness of history) and of the objective pole (determinism; a forgetfulness of the dynamic power of freedom and interpretation in response to milieu and history).

similarly points out the omnipresence of trust. He suggests how walking calmly through a crowd, or riding a taxi, or asking for directions—all human activities—presuppose trust:

We can say, then, that human acts are, in general, based on trust of this kind. . . . Of course, the trust varies in degree in accordance with differences in the social wholes that determine each position in question. Human action cannot, however, take place apart from the presence of trust to one degree or another.³⁵

Again, this promotes the view of trust as functional—necessary for the operation of social life.

However, if we examine his understanding of trust and truth more closely, we find that it might not be as ubiquitous and simple as his hermeneutic method makes it to be. For instance, one might ask, why do we trust people? Do we trust one another because we believe in the inner goodness of persons? Or do we trust one another because society has coerced us to behave in certain ways that therefore can be expected? For Watsuji, the inner goodness or rationality of a person cannot be the ground of trust. People do not have identical understandings of what is good and just. If individuals merely relied on their own reason and their own sense of goodness without regard for the points-of-view of other people, trust would not be possible. It would be like living in a kingdom where everyone is a moral tyrant. But in the same way, social demands and laws alone cannot be the ground for trust. Even though society enforces a sense of order that allows us to trust that people will not behave in a clearly inhumane manner, if people are incapable of thinking for themselves and trying to help each other on the basis of their own individual agency, then a great many of our actions—such as confiding in other people or asking for forgiveness—would be deprived the trust that is their ground.

³⁵ *WTZ10*, 281 (267-268).

It is not social demands that create trust. Nor is it individual goodness that creates trust. But through the conjoined powers of social forces and individual goodness, by which an individual seeks out the good through his own reason and agency yet constantly tries to integrate it with the call of social demands, trust becomes possible. “The ground of trust consists exactly in the movement of the multiplication/unification of subjects through the path of negation.”³⁶ In other words, trust is grounded in double-negation, and is not “I trust that you will do as you say,” but “I trust that you will respond to me both as authentically yourself and as selflessly committed to our relationship.”

The same holds for Watsuji’s understanding of truth. For Watsuji, truth is the response to actual trust relationships (rather than to some abstract ideal). He discusses two examples of truth: honesty (*shingon*) and fidelity (*shinji*). For Watsuji, honesty cannot mean merely saying facts. If a counselor, doctor, or teacher is not careful about which facts to say and when, he or she could seriously impair the well-being of the students or patients. Thus, Watsuji writes, “Relations between human beings decide the issue of truth or falsehood, not the relation between a fact and a word.”³⁷ And this means responding truthfully to another, even if this might mean keeping silent, wording things differently, or perhaps arguably even “benevolent lying.” Similarly, fidelity is not just a matter of doing as one has promised (although most of the time it should be), but it may occasionally entail going against what one has said in order to more fully respond to the other. Thus, truth is not responding to trust as dictated by totality, but as dictated by the double-negation of individuality and totality. Truth is a response to emptiness.

³⁶ Ibid., 283 (269).

³⁷ Ibid., 289 (274).

What we see here is that trust and truth are not meant in the ordinary sense. And thus, I do not think it is these trust and truth that are present in our everyday *expectations* as we go about town or as we do business in the corporate world. These would merely be trust and truth on the social level, and not the bi-directional movement between individuality and totality. As such, I think it is necessary for this Buddhist-hermeneutic model to once again suspend the manifestations of emptiness as a *given fact* and focus on emptiness as an ideal that exists as actual but only in diminished forms.

These *ideal* acts of truth in response to trust are not merely the emptying of the individual ego in order to realize togetherness, but also an emptying of togetherness in order to realize the creative singularity of individuals. The bi-directional emptying that awaits this truth is, of course, none other than trust.

However, a key distinction must be made here. What we are examining is a view of the practice of emptiness that is *not* merely an awakening to true self which is the mystical union of the individual with the universe (as we saw in the “universal awakening model”) but trust and truthfulness that can only occur between an individual member and a *finite* totality. For Watsuji, it is only within finite totality where trust and truth can occur, where people can respond both selflessly and creatively to their *given roles*, where communities can transform in communally realizing emptiness, and where people can respond to each other in a spirit of friendship and understanding.

What kind of trust can occur amongst “all humankind”—given our cultural and historical differences? What kind of trust can occur between Americans and Chinese? What kind of roles might I engage as a “citizen of humankind?” As we have seen in Chapter IV, some skeletal sort of trust and truth are possible across cultural and historical differences, but these are, in general, very thin duties and roles. Unless we can come up

with a concrete relationship with another human being (be it through friendship, an intercultural dialogue, or a trade agreement), it is impossible to realize any sort of context wherein any *actual* benevolence or compassion might occur. *Prior* to any world citizenship, one is already a member of a family, a town, a school, a church, a nation-state—and ignoring these would be a great tragedy for ethical life.

Recapitulation

Above, I have suggested a Buddhist-hermeneutical ethics that highlights overlaps between Watsuji's earlier and later projects, and reframes these in terms of his Buddhist approach. From this model, how might we respond to the questions posed in Chapter V?

First, the dialectic of emptiness can be read here as being *between* individuality and totality, rather than on the side of totality. Second, is and ought are still unified in this model, but emptiness is seen as a principle (of mutual determination) that often operates unrealized by human beings, and therefore must be realized (both in awareness and in action) through the realization of an ideal of empty community.³⁸ And third, this model highlights sections where Watsuji strikes a middle path between a total acceptance of everydayness and a total rejection of it. Here, emptiness is manifest in everyday reality as trust, but often manifests in concealed and degenerate ways. As a result of this, in the *praxis* of emptiness in being truthful, it is necessary to preserve these spiritual trust relationships insofar as they are *real*. But insofar as they are *ideal*, it is necessary, not merely

³⁸ From this reading of Watsuji, the principle of emptiness is (unlike gravity or entropy) inseparable from the *potential* realization by *ningen*, given its functioning not as “objective” but in the unity of subject and object. However, in this reading we cannot go so far as to say that emptiness is inseparable from its *actual* realization. As such, it remains open to the charge of substantializing emptiness.

to become conscious of trust, but to *retrieve* these trust relationships by negating the various individual and institutional egoisms present in *ningen sonzai*.

While this idea of “critical truthfulness in response to trust” may not jibe with Watsuji’s initial declarations of the hermeneutic method, it is supported strongly by his notions of social change and reform. I have discussed this extensively in Chapter III, but we see that from *Ethics I*’s example of Jesus and Buddha leaving their families and communities to form new ones, and as we find in Watsuji’s extensive critique of the distortions of Japanese “filial piety,” the fixations on the family, the lack of public consciousness, the need for a rethinking of urban design and architecture in a way that will promote more individuality, and so on, truthfulness is not necessarily found in social relations as they are; it requires a critique of both individual agents and institutions in order to be realized. Particularly in *Ethics III*, we see Watsuji carrying out the praxis of emptiness in light of the dual-structure of *ningen sonzai*, trying to root out ignorance and states of privation (or social suffering) through his criticism of various manifestations of egoism on both an individual and social level.

4 Contemporary Analysis: Japanese Buddhism and Social Ethics

Watsuji’s attempt to expand the Buddhist idea of emptiness and its practice beyond the individual and toward the various communities that the individual is part of can be seen as part of the movement in modern Buddhism toward Buddhist *social* ethics. In Japan, modernity came amidst great economic, political and international upheaval, forcing many Buddhist thinkers to consider the social ramifications of their religious ideas. Of course, since the founding of Japanese Buddhism, the relationship between Buddhism and society and the state has been a great concern. But modernity gave these concerns a

particular urgency, as can be seen in figures like Seno'o Giro, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Ichikawa Hakugen, and Abe Masao. The relevance of this discourse is by no means confined to Japan. With the spread of Buddhism to America and Europe, the relationship between emptiness and social ethics has become a much larger debate, as can be found in contemporary Buddhist ethics and in the engaged Buddhist movements.

I will end this section by trying to place Watsuji's Buddhist-hermeneutic ethics within this discourse from modern Japanese Buddhist social ethics to the idea of modern Buddhist social ethics in general. I will begin with Christopher Ives's *Zen Awakening and Society* (1992) where he gives a broad overview of social ethics in Japanese Buddhism, with a focus on its modern development and the insights we can gain from this for the contemporary international discourse on Buddhism in society.

4.1 Zen Buddhist Morality

Before examining Ives's key points, let me respond to the possible question of: Why "Zen?" What does Watsuji's Buddhism have to do with Zen? While Watsuji did have some rather crucial work on Zen Master Dōgen, the Buddhism he links to his systematic ethics is largely composed of Theravāda, Mādhyamika and Yogācāra Buddhism. However, as we have seen, Watsuji's Buddhist ethics is centered entirely on the idea of emptiness, its realization, and its praxis, generally deemphasizing the rules of monastic life, karma, the sublime abodes (*brahmavihāras*), the perfections of Bodhisattvas and other elements usually associated with ethics. Thus, there is a strong hint of *modernist* Zen Buddhist philosophy here, which resonates with Ives' following description:

The ethical components of Zen find a practical basis in actual Zen religious life and a theoretical basis primarily in the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā*. As a logical and metaphysical term, *śūnyatā* indicates both the lack of any independent essence or

self in things and the interrelational dynamism that constitutes things. As a soteriological notion, *śūnyatā* signifies the elimination of the suffering (Sanskrit, *duḥkha*) that arises when people posit themselves as independent ‘selves’ over and against independent ‘things’ and through this fixation sever themselves from the world and cling to objects or conditions that bolster their sense of security yet inevitably change in a universe characterised by impermanence (Skt., *anitya*).³⁹

Perhaps one can say without exaggeration that this is *exactly* how Watsuji sees Buddhist ethics—focusing on non-substantiality and interdependence of dharmas, on impermanence, and the standpoint of no-self (*muga*) that results from the realization of these. In a sense, one might say that Watsuji was a “modern Zen theorist” in a way, and images of Zen, such as the casting off of body-mind (*shinjin datsuraku*), occasionally pop up even in *Ethics I*. (This may be due to the influence of figures like Nishida Kitarō, who was, of course, closely associated with D.T. Suzuki) But what I wish to emphasize is that this similarity allows for a fruitful exchange between Watsuji and other modern theories of Zen social ethics.

In Part I of his book, Ives discusses the inherent ethics in Zen Buddhism. After introducing the basics of Zen Buddhist practice, he discusses its ethical dimensions, in response to certain doubts surrounding the viability of an ethics of emptiness. Let us examine these three questions in detail.

The first doubt that is brought up is whether or not one can have an ethics of emptiness, given that “full-access” to the foundation of ethics requires *satori*. With its emphasis on awakening, would ethics not then be available only to the enlightened? Ives’s response to this is by arguing that the fruits of practice arise even prior to awakening. Simplicity, attentiveness, respect for others and nature, appreciation of work, a sense of service, and, most of all, discipline all arise throughout every stage of Zen practice. He

³⁹ Christopher Ives, *Zen Awakening and Society* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992), 2.

writes, “Wisdom, compassion, and other ethically significant fruits emerge throughout the process of Zen practice, not simply upon a *satori* experience, and hence *to varying degrees* play a role in the action of all Zen Buddhists.”⁴⁰

All of Watsuji’s ethical models would deal with this problem cleanly—perhaps because Watsuji was not one to fixate on *satori*. In his Buddhist ethics, emptiness is something that is constantly realized with the body (as seen in the noble eightfold path), thus, equally applicable for every stage of religious praxis. In his hermeneutic ethics and in the Buddhist-hermeneutic model, emptiness is realized both in individualization and the return to totality, allowing ethics to be realized in every stage. Watsuji thus presents a strong model for how an ethics of emptiness can be manifest regardless of “attainment”—as in Dôgen’s ideal of *shushôittô* (the unity of practice and attainment).

The second doubt has to do with the idea of emptiness itself as a “foundation” for ethics. This is a key argument against Buddhist ethics, which Ives summarizes as follows:

To many, *śūnyatā* seems ill-suited as a basis for a system of ethics. It does not offer a God or a divine Will that reveals the good, gives laws, directs events, or persuades people in the direction of greater value; in viewing good and evil as relative, the philosophy of *śūnyatā* postulates no absolute Good; in taking what might be called a trans-rational approach, it does not speak of a practical reason (or natural law) through which moral direction can be found; it takes ordinary moral judgements to be non-substantial and hence tentative, thereby undercutting attempts to establish universally applicable (deontological) rules; with the doctrine of no-self it calls into question the ordinary human 'self' that functions as the locus of ethical agency; and because it is not teleological it does not provide a future-oriented eschatology or a basis for hope in an evolutionary process inherent in the metaphysical nature of things.⁴¹

It is important to note that this criticism is rooted in a particular conception of ethics (that, as we mentioned in Chapter IV, tends to see itself as universal). *Western* ethics comes

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

from a tradition that is rooted in a transcendent absolute—*logos*, reason, or God—and thus, shies away from the idea of an “empty foundation” as a form of nihilism. There are figures in western ethics like Friedrich Nietzsche, Nikolai Berdyaev, John Dewey, Jacques Derrida, and so on, that have proposed a “groundless” ethics similar to Buddhism, but these theories are often pushed to the margins due to this “logocentric” bias.

In response to these doubts, Ives raises the following important characteristics of *śūnyatā*: Emptiness allows for a negation of dualism and self-substantialization that ground egotism and selfishness, opens us up to other people and the world, allows one to see the unity of enlightenment and everydayness, awakens one to the contingency of all ethical decisions, overcomes dichotomies of mind and body, us and them, and so on. While emptiness may not be the solid ground of *logos* that the west is accustomed to, it prevents the closure of the self, the rigidity, and the dualism that are the bugbears of western ethical theory.

Similarly, Watsuji’s ethics uses emptiness to oppose egotism and dualism in many forms. And Watsuji’s notion of continuous negation and the particularity of truthfulness in response to concrete trust relations provides a very clear sense of moral contingency and liberation from static norms of the good. One of Watsuji’s key contributions to ethics in general and to modern Buddhist ethics in particular is that he *systematically* develops an ethics of emptiness that shows an alternative way to ground an ethics of *Sittlichkeit* without appealing to absolute spirit or reason or God.

However, there is a third criticism of Zen Buddhist ethics that is not easy to shake: Given how emptiness negates dualisms, does an ethic of emptiness not transcend the very distinction of good and evil that makes ethics possible? Is enlightenment not a total acceptance of reality as it is? Ives’s response to this is quite complex, and he points out how

non-duality is not merely non-distinction but a distinction within non-distinction—such that there is no attachment to self, but at the same time, one sees oneself as a “self” acting in the midst of reality. While there is no attachment to the distinction of good and evil here, these still maintain their *pragmatic* and *soteriological* importance as ways to help one be emancipated from suffering.⁴²

This question was a difficult one for Watsuji’s hermeneutic ethics, because in his hermeneutic ethics, for the first time, he tried to integrate emptiness with an acceptance of everydayness and its social realities. However, in the Buddhist-hermeneutic model, we can see a reasonable response to the question of good and evil. First, where do the notions of good and evil come from? Most conceptions of good and evil come only from the individual (as in liberal or utilitarian conceptions) or only from society. However, Watsuji shows that trust and truth have a bi-directional movement. Thus, while asserting independence might be considered selfish in an already hyper-autonomized *Gesellschaft* society, it would be considered good in the case of the sentiment in post-war Japan that they were lacking in autonomy. Thus, the conceptions of good and evil might seem “destabilized,” but they have not entirely lost their footing—rather, they have become more responsive to the dual-character of human emancipation.

In summary, Watsuji can be seen, like Ives’s view of Zen, as providing a conception of ethics that, while different from western ethics, does provide a guide to the good life on the basis of no-self, non-duality, and emptiness. However, Ives is still focusing here on a *private* conception of morality—the practice and realization of an individual

⁴² Ibid., 50.

which does open up the individual to social participation but has yet to discuss a *social* ethics directly. Let us examine this next.

4.2 Buddhist Social Ethics

Before analyzing the modern idea of Buddhist social ethics, Ives briefly goes over the history of ethical and political stances of Japanese Zen Buddhism. He discusses its beginnings with Eisai's and Dôgen's largely conservative relationship with the state, which continued in the late Kamakura, Muromachi and Tokugawa periods, with Buddhism giving its support to the state even during the Pacific War:

As Ichikawa Hakugen, Daizen Victoria and others have pointed out, the most conspicuous theme in this history is the close connection between Zen and the political status quo. . . . Criticism and social action do not readily emerge, for traditional sources of authority and undemocratic political processes are often accepted as part of the familiar status quo. And even when Zen Buddhists may have disagreed with the status quo, oppressive political forces could have rendered social activism extremely difficult. Throughout most of Japanese history Zen has existed under a series of repressive leaders, including the Minamoto warriors, Hojo regents, Ashikaga warriors, the Tokugawa shoguns, anti-Buddhist Meiji reformers and militarists during World War II. Under such conditions, existing political structures and practices may have been accepted as the only or the proper order of things, with no notion of alternatives. Or, Zen figures may have decided to remain silent and direct their energies toward religious transformation, thinking that risky activism aimed at some sort of social or political change could jeopardise efforts to promote higher-order religious emancipation. If this is indeed what occurred, one may ask whether this was an act of cowardice or an act of compassion, amounting to either escapism or religious commitment.⁴³

As he phrases it even more critically in the introduction:

Zen does contain significant resources for a social ethic, but, judging from the history of Japanese Zen, it does not *necessarily* lead to social engagement; and the engagement that has occurred has assumed varying forms, some of which stand in tension

⁴³ Ibid., 67.

with certain Buddhist principles and ideals, in part due to a historical lack of self-critical, systematic consideration of Zen and social ethics.⁴⁴

In other words, despite the theoretical bases for a critical anti-egoist ethics, Zen Buddhism often merely ceded social ethics to Confucian views, resulting in social engagements that were often at odds with the ideals of selflessness, non-violence and compassion.⁴⁵

It is in response to this history that modern Zen social ethics has arisen. Ives focuses on three main figures: Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889-1980), Abe Masao (1915-2006) and Ichikawa Hakugen (1902-1986). Let me go quickly over the key points suggested by these thinkers that are relevant to our question.

Rinzai Zen master Hisamatsu's primary concern was to overcome "Zen within a ghostly cave"—a quietistic Zen focused only on the awakening of individuals. In order to achieve this, he advocated Zen for all people (*taishûzen*) where each person can face his/her fundamental koan in everyday life. This spiritual practice of overcoming the ultimate antinomy of sin and death was to be manifest not merely in private enlightenment. Rather, enlightenment is an awakening to "formless self," that is at one with "the standpoint of all humankind" and that is the basis of "supra-historical history."⁴⁶ This FAS Zen thus extended *prajñā* to include the study of science, politics, economics, and other pursuits of "worldly knowledge," and tried to engage the spiritual and the mundane suffering in society by transforming history as a whole. However, Hisamatsu was completely opposed to the nation-state and saw it as a "fatally deadlocked egoistic structure."⁴⁷ His

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵ See Ibid., 101.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 77.

overall stance can be seen in the following “Vow of Humankind,” which symbolizes the communal awakening of the FAS Society:

Keeping calm and composed, let us awaken to our True Self, become fully compassionate humans, make full use of our gifts according to our respective missions in life, discern the agony both individual and social and its source, recognize the right direction in which history should proceed, and join hands as brothers and sisters without distinctions of race, nation, or class. Let us, with compassion, vow to bring to realization humankind’s deep desire for Self-emancipation and construct a world in which everyone can truly and fully live.⁴⁸

Like Watsuji, Hisamatsu had a very strong drive to see the awakening to emptiness as alive in society and history. He also saw the possibility of “communal” suffering, egoism, praxis, and emancipation, which are central to Watsuji’s dual-structure. However, a key difference between the two thinkers is that Hisamatsu, like the “universal awakening” model we mentioned, saw enlightenment (both of the individual and the community) as directed toward to universal, rather than directly toward each other.⁴⁹ This leads to a marginal position of finite totalities. Hisamatsu’s enlightened man’s allegiance is to universal community and history—and all finite forms of membership to nation or class are to be *overcome*.

Abe Masao, a student of Hisamatsu, was also greatly concerned with the social practice of Zen. One of his key contributions is the idea of karma and the possibility of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁹ While this can be nuanced further, strong evidence for this can be found in Hisamatsu’s idea of formless self, which is the self at the point where “waves and water are one.” Thus, while there is a sense of others, these are not concrete others in finite totalities but the infinite totality of humankind. I have discussed this extensively in my master’s thesis entitled *Surmounting the Strife of the Age of Modern Technology: A Dialogue with Heidegger and Zen* (Quezon City, Metro Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 2007).

communal karma—and thus, communal responsibility for systematic evil and moral tragedies like the Holocaust.⁵⁰ Another interesting contribution is his focus on “*deanthropocentrism*” –a mutual responsibility, not just of all human beings, but of all creation.

Again, Abe’s focus is on universal awakening, and he tends to disregard the role of finite totalities in this process of universal salvation. However, I think Watsuji would concur with his deanthropocentrism. As Augustin Berque has been developing, Watsuji provides a view of the human being that is inseparable from its milieu (*fûdo*). This allows for a sense of deep connection to ecology, without the tendency to substantiate an “original” state of nature and allowing for more balanced considerations of technology.

Ichikawa Hakugen was a vocal critic of the wartime collaboration of Buddhism. His critique of Japanese thought is extensive, but I focus on four points. First, Ichikawa pointed out that enlightenment must not become entrapped within given forms of morality—including the central fixtures of Japanese morality like the *Imperial Rescript on Education* (*Kyôiku chokugo*, 1890) and the *Fundamental Principles of National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongî*, 1937). Second, he warned of the tendency of Zen to fixate on harmony, sometimes leading to harmony with the wrong things—State Shintô, imperial power, the military, and so on. Third, Zen’s notion of “seeing the universal in the particular” can result in an organicist view of totality, which overemphasizes the view of society as an *ie* (home). And fourth, Zen tends to confuse peace of mind (*anshin*) with social safety and order (*anzen*).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ives, *Zen Awakening*, 88-89.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

Ichikawa's critique would tear apart much of Watsuji's hermeneutic ethics—its fixation on the imperial rescript, its harmonization with the state, its view of the state as an imperial household, and its fixation on maintaining social stability. However, with a close look at the critical moments of Watsuji's systematic ethics, especially the Buddhist-hermeneutic model, we see that Watsuji himself tried to address these concerns. Social morality is not something given, but something that must be questioned and must evolve. The individuating moment of ethics requires the negation of any "harmony with totality" and the safety of the status quo, requiring the courage (and often, the sacrifice) of the "prophet." However, I do not think Watsuji would ever cede the systems approach to the state. While the model of the "*ie*" can be misused, it might not necessarily be wise to replace it with a more individualist or agonist view of the state. Even in sociology and political theory, this remains a contested matter.

Looking at Watsuji in relation to Hisamatsu, Abe, Ichikawa, and Ives's ideas, we see that Watsuji has a lot of similarities with the movement of Zen social ethics. The Buddhist-hermeneutic model ensures that the realization of emptiness be tied with the everyday engagement of all people with social and historical life. However, Watsuji's finite totalities model is at odds with the universal awakening model these four thinkers present. For these four thinkers, the negation of self opens the ego to the universal. And from this radically open subjectivity, one then considers how to concretely expand *prajñā* to political, economic and social realities, how to address finite roles, and so on.

However, for Watsuji, this would be remarkably abstract. How could I love humankind "in general" without loving my family, my countrymen first? Thus, in the Buddhist-hermeneutic model, awakening is much more complex. First, awakening is, in a sense, a distancing from society. As we see in Watsuji's discussions of Jesus, Shakyamuni

and Dôgen, facing the absolute is a singularizing event that takes one away from concrete society, roles and expectations. *Prajñā* does not flow smoothly into *karuṇā*. If anything, wisdom *negates* compassion. But from this enlightenment, one can then *creatively and critically* reengage community. This *negation* of one's solitary enlightenment is a reengagement, not with universal community, but with actual finite totalities—family, friends, fellow citizens, and so forth. This ensures that the “unity of study and practice” (*gakugyô ichinyo*)⁵² Hisamatsu suggests is *immediately* part of self-emptying rather than auxiliary to it. As such, Watsuji's discussion of economics as mutual service, the virtues of cultural life, political virtues (like the justice of giving each person his/her place) can be seen not only as a contribution to the concrete “application” of emptiness but as the concrete *manifestation* without which emptiness would not even be possible.

Thus, Watsuji can be seen as both allied with Zen social ethics, and also contributing a different view of social ethics in which awakening is not only inseparable from social ethics, but is at once in tension with and at the same time inevitably expressed as social ethics. He thus offers a social, political and economic theory that is more essentially linked to his ethics of emptiness than any mere “application” of enlightenment to social reality might be. Whether Watsuji's notion of awakening to finite totality is better than, or worse than, or should be combined with universal awakening is a matter I leave for future study.

4.3 Dharmic Materialism

⁵² *Ibid.*, 71.

Above, we have entertained the possibility that perhaps many (or most) contemporary theories of Buddhist social ethics are merely grafting social praxis and liberation onto a fundamentally individualist project of universal awakening. Ives himself has tried to resist this unnatural grafting by showing how human freedom is inherently social, and thus, praxis and the egoism it responds to are both individual and communal, as well. However, the view of communality here still remains, in many ways, amorphous and unspecified—a state of affairs that Watsuji might help remedy.

However, there is an important exception to this “grafted” social Buddhism, which is currently being advanced by James Mark Shields through his research on the Nichiren lay Buddhist Seno’o Girô (1889-1961) and the idea of “dharmic materialism.”

Shields introduces Seno’o as a part of the movements of new Buddhism and Buddhist socialism that arose in modernizing Japan. Buddhist thinkers like Uchiyama Gudô and Kiyozawa Manshi risked much as they wrestled with concrete social problems like poverty and the values of capitalism. The tide turned strongly against these reformers (especially those with clearly socialist rhetoric) as the Taishô period came to a close. But, against this tide, Seno’o rose up to offer a direct critique of the capitalist problems of Japan. He founded the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism (*Shinkô Bukkyô Seinen Dômei*) in the 1930s. In the manifesto of the league, he writes:

For us, religion is life itself. Society is our concern. That is to say, society is what we are made of. Politics, economics, education, the military as well as the arts and so on, are all subsumed under religion. All aspects of social life must be subject to critique and reform in light of the spirit of the Buddha.⁵³

⁵³ James Mark Shields, “A Blueprint for Buddhist Revolution: The Radical Buddhism of Seno’o Girô (1889-1961) and the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism,” *Japanese Journal for Religious Studies* 39.2 (2012), 334.

To this end, he established the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism with the following manifesto:

1. We resolve to realize the implementation of a Buddha Land in this world, based on the highest character of humanity as revealed in the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha and in accordance with the principle of brotherly love.
2. We accept that all existing sects, having profaned the Buddhist spirit, exist as mere corpses. We reject these forms, and pledge to enhance Buddhism in the spirit of the new age.
3. We recognize that the present capitalistic economic system is in contradiction with the spirit of Buddhism and inhibits the social welfare of the general public. We resolve to reform this system in order to implement a more natural society.⁵⁴

With this, let me highlight the following features of Seno'o's Buddhist materialism, as presented by Shields in the first article and as he developed it philosophically in the second: First, given his base in the philosophy of Nichiren, Seno'o avoided the transcendentalist view of emancipation and instead asserted the need to realize the Buddha land in this world, amidst the socio-economic and political facets of the actual human world. Part of this "this-worldliness" involved a critique of the usage of karma to justify social inequality, and the transcendental escapism that merely "intellectually reframes" suffering rather than actually overcoming it. Shields sees this as the core of materialism, as a humanism—a focus on the human world and a refusal of any abstractions that escape from it.

Second, this focus on the human world had a strong materialist base—the acknowledgement that suffering is conditioned by material relations, particularly economic relations. This resulted in a concern with the material and spiritual sources of suffering, which led Seno'o to a total critique of capitalism as a source of suffering and an

⁵⁴ Ibid., 340.

enemy of Buddhism. He warns that, without this “grounding in a material world, the dharma would become a means of escape from existence, and thus, an ‘opiate’ like any other religion.”⁵⁵ Shields warns though that this is not a materialist *reductionism* but a non-reductive physicalism (akin to the philosophies of Antonio Gramsci, György Lukács, Jean-Paul Sartre, Richard Rorty, Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari) which tries to balance material needs (physicalism) with issues of alienation and consciousness (nology).

Third, Seno’o saw our condition—both our suffering and our emancipation—as inseparable from the social. Thus, Buddhism is not just about suffering and awakening but about *alienation* and our *liberation* (*kaihô*) from it. Shields writes:

Also of note is Seno’o’s emphasis on awakening as “human liberation” that he also adds as a communal element lacking in most traditional renderings of the experience of *nirvana* or *satori*. The term *kaihô* 解放 is in fact best translated as “liberation” or “emancipation” and is generally used to apply to social or political freedom . . .⁵⁶

Shields grounds this notion of *kaihô* in the idea of emancipation in Marx’s essay “On the Jewish Question,” where emancipation is discussed as “species life” that unifies individuality and totality. Marx writes:

Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his “*forces propres*” as *social forces*, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 345-346.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 345.

⁵⁷ James Mark Shields, “Liberation as Revolutionary Praxis: Rethinking Buddhist Materialism,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 20 (2013), 479.

Shields also reminds us of the need to maintain the singularity of the “real, sensuous human being” that tends to be lost when Marx’s philosophy degrades into a deterministic historical materialism (as Sartre suggests).⁵⁸ This gives us a notion of emancipation, seconded and reasserted by the scholar of Marxism Leszek Kolakowski, as both singular and communal—a species-being wherein both the personal perfection and the social life of the human being are united.⁵⁹

Finally, the need for liberation from material and spiritual sources of suffering thus requires a Marxist unity of theory and praxis, where the overcoming of false consciousness and the realization of alienation are *essentially realized* as praxis—a structural reformation of the relations between the individual, society and the material world. Shields develops the foundations of this quite thoroughly as the interdependence of matter and mind and of knower and known—it is only by realizing the ineluctable interdependence of matter and mind that we see that all knowing fundamentally alters the known, and is thus not merely a matter of consciousness but of structural transformation and action.

This view of dharmic materialism is very close to that of Watsuji Tetsurō. First, ignoring questions of “value-neutrality,” a core aim of Watsuji’s metaphysics was to go home to the actual situation of *ningen sonzai* as it manifests in everyday life. Thus, even his idealized forms of community had nothing to do with heaven or some spiritual contact, but human beings relating to each other in embodied ways, sharing in concrete media, like knowledge, art, or belief. Watsuji’s hermeneutic ethics is inherently this-worldly.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 470.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 481.

Second, Watsuji was concerned with the inescapably material character of *ningen sonzai*. In Chapter I, we saw Watsuji's appropriation of Marx as an attempt to resolve the life of the subject with its material conditions. Also, we see this materiality in his idea of milieu which shows how human beings are necessarily shaped by their surroundings—from the home, to the village, to the climate of the region. We see this in his notion of “subjective bodies,” (see Chapter IV) which ensures that practical linkages are always via embodied *acts* carried out in space and time. Finally, the very idea of *mediation* of relationships shows that the connection between people always has to do with the “economy” of concrete things—from sound waves, to marks on paper, to consumer goods. However, while Watsuji was clearly critical of capitalism and a proponent of “socialism,” he was remarkably averse to the problem of social class—a problem that deserves further examination.

Third, the dialectic unity of individuality and totality in “species life” is arguably the centerpiece of Watsuji's systematic ethics. Like Seno'o's idea of *kaihô*, Watsuji's notion of freedom as negation, which is manifest in spiritual community as trust and truth, is also a unity of both individual and social perfection. We see here the reason why Watsuji valued Marx as one of the few sufficiently communal thinkers of Western history. However, at this stage, it is not clear if Seno'o would see the individual as *tensionally* linked with totality, or if, like in the idea of *absolute Sittlichkeit*, it is possible that they be completely reconciled in species life. Also, it is not yet clear what stance Seno'o takes toward finite totalities—although his approach to economics and politics is much more immediate than thinkers like Hisamatsu and Ichikawa.

And fourth, like Seno'o, our concern in this chapter has been to show how a Buddhist-hermeneutic model of ethics might unify theory and praxis, where the theoretical

knowing of what *ningen sonzai* necessarily is (empty) is inseparable from the practical realization of *ningen sonzai* ought to be (empty as in the self-aware sharing of emptiness in ethical life). This inseparability of theory and praxis is part of the non-duality of subject and object, in the fundamental ethical question wherein *ningen* asks, “What is *ningen*?” (*Ningen to wa nani ka?*)

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen the gap between Watsuji’s Buddhist ethics and his hermeneutic project. We have also seen the academic and political importance of both recognizing this gap as well as trying to mend it. The mending of this gap has resulted in a Buddhist-hermeneutic model, which emerges by selectively highlighting critical moments in the hermeneutic ethics (states of privation) as well as the hidden ideal (cultural community) that inform the selectiveness of Watsuji’s acceptance of everyday life. This Buddhist-hermeneutic model is thus able to structure the dialectics of emptiness, the unity of is and ought, and the tension of immanence and transcendence in such a way that we are able to account both for Watsuji’s attention to the realities of everyday social life and his critique of society that came to the fore in *Ethics III*. Finally, we have seen that this model is similar to other theorists of Zen social ethics such as Hisamatsu, Abe, Ichikawa and Ives, but suggests a different way of seeing enlightenment as “awakening to finite totality” rather than “universal awakening.” While not identical to it, this model is very similar to the “dharmic materialism” suggested by Shields’ reading of Seno’o.

We have reached the end of our journey into the insights and dilemmas of Watsuji Tetsurô, and we are tasked now with examining how these various insights might come together in a synthetic look at the ethics of emptiness.

General Conclusion

Over the course of this dissertation, I have hoped to articulate the ethical system of Watsuji Tetsurô in its entirety, focusing on the novel ways in which he is being appropriated in various countries in response to contemporary philosophical problems, and the very limitations within Watsuji that confound these contributions. In doing so, I have hoped that this honest and critical reading of Watsuji might pave the way for a creative *re-reading* of Watsuji—a “neo-Watsujianism” that might ground and further develop the various appropriations of Watsuji abroad.

1 The *Raison d'être* of Ethics

Let us return to the core questions of this dissertation. First, what was Watsuji trying to accomplish in his 12-year project of systematic ethics? In Chapter I, I suggested four core ideas that form the essence of Watsuji's systematic ethics. Let us reexamine these four in light of the details we have seen in Chapters II to VI.

The first idea is Watsuji's attempt to grasp the truth of *ningen sonzai* through dualities. In Chapter V, we saw that this “dialectic” way of thinking was inspired by the mutual influence of Buddhism and Hegelianism, where it is often necessary to wrestle with elements that seem to be mutually contradictory in order to grasp how reality unfolds for the human being. Through the dialectics of emptiness, he attempted to overcome what

he saw as the one-sidedness of other ethical systems, in order to consider key dual-structures of human existence: subject vs. object, individual vs. totality, and other dualities that arise from these (private vs. public, space vs. time, climate vs. history, universal vs. particular, ideal vs. material, etc.).

These dualities guided our exploration of the inner tensions of Watsuji's ethics, and in Chapters II, III, IV, and VI, we dealt with the dialectic tension between singularity and relationality, individual and nation, moral universality vs. relativity, and immanence vs. transcendence. The idea of emptiness was central to trying to maintain the tensional unity of these pairs, despite Watsuji's own difficulties in wrestling with these paradoxes.

The second core idea was the attempt to apply these dualities to ethics, in particular, and thus retrieve the *ethical relevance of communal life* in the face of the theoretical predominance of individualist theories of ethics. Even prior to the systems approach of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), one can say that Watsuji had tried to effect a paradigm shift, a *cybernetic revolution* within ethical theory itself, thinking of ethics from the point of view of interacting systems rather than merely individual rationality, action, virtue, or utility.

This was primarily stressed in Chapter II, with Watsuji's notion of *aidagara* and the centrality of practical interconnections of acts in understanding ethical life. But this was developed further in every chapter: the relational citizens in Chapter III, the relational state in Chapter IV, and a uniquely relational approach to awakening and enlightenment in Chapters V and VI. Thus, the ethics of emptiness was seen to be something that overcomes the fundamental ignorance of an isolated view of self and sees ethics as fundamentally situated in *Sittlichkeit*.

However, there is a need to qualify the *nature* of the relationships that ethics manifests in. This leads to the third core idea: Watsuji's sociological/anthropological (*shakaigaku teki, ningengaku teki*) attempt to clarify the nature of human relationships. The interaction of subjectivity-objectivity and individuality-totality in *ningen sonzai* allowed Watsuji to greatly expand the view of human relations. In Chapters II and III, we examined the multifaceted (embodied, emotive, volitional, and rational) character of relations, and how they are mediated by sharing in particular things like lifestyle, labor, material goods, cultural products, language, ideas, and so on. In Chapter IV, we examined the connection of relationships to climate and other geographic factors that are often neglected in more abstract theories of human relation. Here, the idea of the emptiness of each pole of the various dual structures of human existence was manifested as the principle of human relationships, which universally governs the interactions of human beings.

Avoiding the one-sidedness of ethics and examining the various facets of relationality are essential to making ethics *real*. But it is not real enough until it concerns the *this, here, and now*—the present concerns of actual ethical life. This leads to the fourth core idea: the focus on *finite, concrete totalities*. Watsuji thus situates this sociological/anthropological analysis within actual spatio-temporal trust relationships that situate ethical responses. And most importantly, in Chapter IV, we saw Watsuji bring ethics home to his own nation and the difficult historical demands placed upon it during and after World War II.

2 The Contributions of *Ethics*

Despite the fact that Watsuji was Japanese and that he wrote exclusively in Japanese, the above *raison d'être* has been appropriated in many discourses that extend beyond

Watsuji's original context and argument. Scholars like Robert Carter, Erin McCarthy, Steve Odin, John Maraldo, Christopher Jones, and William LaFleur (to name a few) have recognized the above contributions of Watsuji and have tried to see how his continuing relevance might be realized today. Thus, we proceed to the second question: How can Watsuji contribute to the various philosophical discourses surrounding the contemporary problems of global society?

In Chapter II, building on the arguments of McCarthy, we have seen how Watsuji's multi-faceted view of radical relationality and its accompanying theory of virtues might contribute to ethics of care. Furthermore, highlighting the dynamic, anti-substantializing character of emptiness, we have seen that, in an attempt to envision the togetherness of singularities-in-relation, Watsuji may be allied with poststructuralist theories of community.

In Chapter III, we have seen through Maraldo and Luke Dorsey how Watsuji's attempt to theorize the relationship of the individual and society can be used productively in furthering the liberal-communitarian debates. Watsuji's ethical system can be read as quite a thoroughgoing critique of liberalism, providing an ethical and social theory that debunks such individualist premises. But at the same time, it can be seen as a critique of communitarianism, with its attempt to retain a sense of universality (of structure but not content) and its maintenance of certain liberal ideals in the examination of the dynamics of a community.

In Chapter IV, we have seen how Watsuji's treatment of national morals and universal morality can contribute to the rethinking of the debate on moral relativism and cosmopolitanism. Watsuji shows a very early attempt (perhaps one of the first) to include

the problem of moral pluralism and the findings of anthropology within a theoretical account of ethics. It also attempts to suggest possible ways in which the encounter between these different cultural moralities might be productive, as well as the unifying framework that, as a *structure*, might allow for a tolerant but critically involved relation of differing moral *contents*, in a way that is not merely minimalist (as the mere tolerance of difference is), but that suggests a deep mutual responsibility between differing cultures. We examined this as part of a possible *global ethics* that applies Watsuji's structural insights to contemporary changes in globalization and informatization.

Finally, in Chapters V and VI, we have seen how the unity of Watsuji's modern Buddhist ethics and his systematic (hermeneutic) ethics might contribute to the rethinking of the relationship between transcendence and everydayness that presents a key problem for Buddhist social ethics today. Through a Buddhist-hermeneutic ethical model, Watsuji can contribute a theory of awakening, not as "universal awakening," but as awakening to finite totalities—allowing for an immediate unity between spiritual liberation and structural emancipation in social, economic, political and historical life. This model can also perhaps be allied with dharmic materialism which combines Marxism with Buddhist insights.

From feminist ethics to political philosophy to global ethics, Watsuji's ethics of emptiness has demonstrated longevity and an ability to stimulate rethinking of conventional discourses and presuppositions. And I think that Watsuji's attempt to bring ethics home to the concrete situation of humans in-relation will continue to be of value even in other fields of philosophy and social science—from discourse theory to the philosophy of education to the philosophy and therapy of the family.

3 The Limitations of *Ethics*

Despite the various contributions of Watsuji's thought, I have also made sure to point out the limitations of his thought—limitations that often get in the way of the very possibilities that scholars have tried to see in him. This moves us to the third question, of the limitations and contradictions of Watsuji's thought.

As we have seen all throughout this work, there is a frustrating amount of *inconsistency* in Watsuji's thought. He is often ambiguous and self-contradictory. As suggested in Chapter III, these inconsistencies are partially historical—an inevitable contingency arising from the maddening circumstances of World War II. But as we have seen in other chapters, a lot of these inconsistencies were theoretical in nature, and perhaps had to do with the sheer difficulty of the quandaries Watsuji was faced with and his *inability to overcome them*.

There are three main theoretical problems that Watsuji was faced with. First was the overall vagueness in the application of the concept of emptiness (*kū*). As we have seen in Chapters V and VI, there are multiple conflicting ways in which Watsuji uses this Buddhist idea, giving the impression that Watsuji himself was not entirely sure about its use. Second, Watsuji's attempt to retrieve the value of relationality often upset the balance of his dual structure. This was very clear in Chapters II and III. Finally, Watsuji's attempt to describe the nature of how relationships take place was often confused with his attempt to prescribe how relationships ought to be. This problem casts its shadow on every chapter, but is highlighted in Chapters IV and VI.

These theoretical confusions lead to several problems. In Chapter II, we see that Watsuji can be read as ignoring the singularity of persons and thus reducing them to relations, which they cannot critically participate in. This is magnified in Chapter III, where

the weakness of the idea of individuality leads to a tendency to be socio-politically totalitarian and fascist—often turning the citizen into a mere functionary of the whole. In Chapter IV, the influence of Watsuji's own nation-state manifests as a form of Japanism, where critics suggest that Watsuji's purported universal ethical theory was, in many ways, an imposition of uniquely Japanese modes of thought, and thus, an attempt at cultural imperialism. Also, the limitations of his historical situation made him blind to the transnational elements of globalization and migration which are key problems today. Finally, in Chapter V and VI, we saw the tendency of a slavish acceptance of everydayness and the functional rules of society to dominate over any critical realization of freedom and creative transformation. Given these, one can say that, at least partly, Watsuji was collectivist, totalitarian, Japanist, culturalist and acritical—and, as we have seen, there are many scholars, especially in Japan, who would not hesitate to call him that.

I believe it is important to be aware of these problems: First is for the sake of intellectual honesty—these are complex issues and Watsuji by no means dealt with them easily. But beyond that, an awareness of Watsuji's problems can also prevent us from making similar mistakes, especially as we traverse difficult theoretical and practical problems in social, cultural, political and religious philosophy. For example, it reminds ethics of care to consider singularity and the complexities of caring relations, challenges communitarians to consider the problem of social change and cultural fragmentedness, and compels ethicists who are wrestling with the problem of moral relativism to consider ethical presuppositions they can sneak through the backdoor.

A third and final point: Awareness of Watsuji's limitations would allow us to gather our resources (both from within Watsuji's texts and beyond them) in hopes of carrying out the tasks that Watsuji has begun, and hopefully bringing them to a higher level of perfection.

4 A Double-Negation of Watsuji's *Ethics*

How is it possible that Watsuji was able to contribute to all these discourses in the theory of the person, society, history, and religion, despite the contradictions in his thought and his inability to resolve these dilemmas? Perhaps it is a mark not in favor of Watsuji's cleverness but against his intellectual seriousness that he was capable of forging on even when his ideas were unclear. This results in a *seemingly* cohesive philosophical system that is, upon close examination, terribly muddled and inconsistent. Thus, a selective reading could allow one to come up with a wide range of stances—from communitarian, to totalitarian, to a brilliant transcendence of the liberal-communitarian binary, and so on—all attributed to the same person.

I have attempted to apply Watsuji's ethics of emptiness in response to contemporary problems in global philosophy. However, perhaps I might be accused of arbitrariness, for if Watsuji is a "magic box" from which one can pull anything out, then perhaps there is no point in reading him at all. In response to this, I would like to reemphasize that *all* these positive readings of Watsuji—as overcoming the binaries of singular/relational, liberal/communitarian, particular/universal, and immanent/transcendent—are all *the same reading* of Watsuji Tetsurô. That is to say, Watsuji can be read productively and in a *consistent* way by highlighting the notion of emptiness the way I suggested in the Buddhist-hermeneutic model.

Let us begin with the notion of the Buddhist-hermeneutic take on emptiness. In this model, emptiness functions as a principle, a movement that operates in the reality of *ningen sonzai*, whether we are aware of it or not. This principle is one of bottomlessness, of being without a foundation, without a solid place to construct reality. We have seen two axes of this principle: First is the non-duality of subject and object. Reality is not merely as I think it to be, nor is it merely the material stuff that naïve scientism considers. Rather, reality exists in the dynamic interaction of the knower and the known, between the human and the natural. Second is the non-duality of individuality and totality, or in Roger Ames's terminology, of focal moments and field moments. In a systemic approach to ethics, one cannot approach reality by beginning from individual units and then working up to the whole. However, one cannot begin with the whole and work back to the individual units either. Rather, individuality and totality are equiprimordial and exist in their mutual tension.

The mutual tension of individuality and totality means that (like in care ethics) we begin with betweenness or relation as our starting point. However, there are two points that we have to be wary of here. First, betweenness means *between individuality and totality*—relationality is *not* identical to a “relational whole.” Such a mistake would lead to collectivism. Second, betweenness is both objective and subjective. As objective, it must be mediated by actual things—trade relations, education, shared emotions, a shared environment, etc. This gives us room to explore how different media might engender differing ways of relating (as in Arendt's theory of labor, work, and action). Furthermore, as subjective, these media are not *given*. Rather, they are subject to dynamic reinterpretation and renegotiation—just as cultural products are constantly produced and reproduced. This

dynamicity means that individuality and totality remain in *tension* within betweenness, because individuality is singular and can dynamically introduce changes in the form and interpretation of these shared things. This tension means that relationality is always singularities-in-relation (a nod to post-structuralism), where individuals never statically overlap with each other in the sharing of mediating things.

In the dialectic of private and public existence, we see that totalities formed by individuals occur on many levels, and the systems formed by individual persons can form individual subsystems within a supersystem, and so on. In Watsuji's time, it was the nation-state that seemed to be the most public totality. As such a totality, the state was morally tasked with uniting individuals as citizens in mutual service of the national whole. But there are other "individuals," subsystems composed of multiple persons, as small as two-person relationships, and as large as religious groups that are sometimes almost as large as the nation itself. If the state is to respond to individuals as *relational persons*, the state will have to consider not only the citizen qua singularity, but the citizen qua this plurality of memberships. In this, the notion of emptiness embraces and transcends the liberal-communitarian debates by beginning with singularities-in-relation.

However, mediated relationships are plural, but their plurality is not necessarily smooth and nesting like a well-made Matryoshka doll, where the family nests into the locale, which nests into the nation. Rather, the many totalities an individual is part of are often overlapping. For example, an individual has a financial relationship with his or her family, and also with economic partners, and also with the state—and these multiple memberships are not always in agreement with each other. Thus, the individual experiences *role conflict*, where the company might demand for something that, as an employee, one can agree to, but as a husband one cannot. This is something that the individual and

the state both have to contend with, because it makes the state and citizenship within it heterogenous, fragmented, and contested. This also demands a mode of discourse between the citizen, groups, and the state that allow for these tensions to be addressed.

Furthermore, the national totality is still a *finite* totality, related to other nation-states in the global order. However, as the problem of moral and cultural relativism make clear, it is not easy to understand our fellow human beings. Due to the interaction of communities with their respective environments, and also because of contingencies in their historical development, cultural communities have predominant ways of organizing themselves in both the material and the conscious facets of their communal life. And these ways of organization can be completely perplexing to a distant culture. However, the very engine of emptiness that we have been considering gives us a place to start. While there may not be many (if any) universals governing *moral content*, it is possible that the *structure* of morality is universal: All morality aims at a self-conscious realization of the non-dual relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, and the reconciliation between individual and communal life. Other nations may have markedly different ways of establishing totality or individuality, or they may have very different objective or subjective circumstances they are responding to. But perhaps if we are aware that they exist within this shared structure of realizing non-duality, the rudiments of international respect become possible, and the seeds of transcultural critique and mutual involvement are sown.

Furthermore, just as filial, economic, and political relationships overlap and intertwine, it is not necessary to draw indelible lines between cultures, nations, or states. Globalization presents us with the rapid growth of interconnections in every dimension of human existence. Politically, we have various intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Economically, we have growing international

economic interdependencies, transnational labor, and the gigantic economies of multinational corporations. Culturally, we have global discourses like those on human rights that frame the way we respond to shared problems. The internet has allowed for the widespread sharing of news, entertainment, and ideas, as well as prejudices, biases, and misinformation. Also, we have the rise of a global milieu (*fûdo*)—where all states contend with problems like global warming, pollution, mass extinctions, overpopulation, and global epidemics.

What we have now is an *interconnected world*. It is tempting to think of this interconnection as the union of individual human beings under the umbrella of “one humankind.” But Watsuji reminds us that the relational situatedness of each human being complicates this unity. Thus, these interconnections are lines—they divide even as they unify. And the tensional unity of the individual and the totality replicates itself exponentially in the multiple belongings of our global existence.

However, amidst these complications, Watsuji presents us with an ethics of relation. The political, economic, and cultural linkages of the global village are not just lines of power but are lines of relation—lines of trust that call for the truthfulness of *ningen*. Entangled in these lines, we are called to be aware—of the multiple totalities that shape us as global citizens, and of the multiple agencies we possess within these connections; of the objective determinations of these lines of power, and our subjective freedom in giving meaning to them. We are called to be aware of these tensions that constitute our existence as *ningen sonzai*, and avoid one-sidedness as the world clamors for human rights, group rights, patriotism, cosmopolitan mindedness, radical critique, or an acceptance of things as they are. And by avoiding one-sidedness, we avoid the hubris of a

CONCLUSION

certain yet one-dimensional grasp of being, a grasp that turns quickly into a violence of the most self-assured sort.

Afterword

Reading this dissertation, perhaps one gets the sense that Watsuji tried to do too much. He spread himself too thin, engaging religious psychology, existentialism, relational ethics, anthropology, sociology, social theory, political philosophy, international relations theory, philosophy of history... He turned to every corner of the globe—Germany, France, America, the United Kingdom, China, India, Japan... Some might speak of this positively, seeing Watsuji as a prototype for “interdisciplinary research” or “comparative research.” But Watsuji was not deliberately trying to cross disciplinary borders and compare cultures (as we academicians sometimes try to do). His concern was an ontology and ethics of *ningen sonzai*, and this concern left him no choice: Human existence does not confine itself within the lines of disciplines or cultures. And in the face of the question of human existence, perhaps we all spread ourselves too thin.

Watsuji had more than a dozen years for this project, yet we find him too worn out for his own insights. My ambition to bring Watsuji forward into this (even more) globalized age will probably take a lifetime.

In the next few years, I hope to continue this work I have begun on the problem of *ningen sonzai* and *aidagara*. There are two main directions I hope to carry on in this work. The first is *global ethics*. Global justice still has a very strong liberal-individualist tendency that I think needs to be counterbalanced by relational models of ethics like care ethics or like Watsuji's. Hopefully, Watsuji can bring a softer side to this discourse of

justice, with a view of how to respond truthfully to newly formed connections of trust. The second direction is *relational pedagogy*. Education is the art of *aidagara*, tasked with taking part in the formation of human beings amidst the dual demands of *ningen sonzai*. Perhaps Watsuji has something to contribute to the contradictory calls for a sense of communal belonging and individual criticality in education.

Both global ethics and relational pedagogy have to do with an *applied ethics of emptiness*. If there is one thing I have learned from Watsuji, it is that emptiness is the most concrete thing there is. And it is a mark of our failing as scholars that emptiness is perceived to be arcane, quietistic, and abstract.

Glossary of Key Translations

縁起	Dependent arising, Skt. <i>pratītyasamutpāda</i> [Some translate this as “interdependent co-arising,” but given the dialectic progression emphasized in Watsuji’s reading of <i>engi</i> , the simpler translation is closer to his point.]
間	Between
間柄	Relationship, relationality, betweenness (Carter)
共同体・共同性	Community, Communalit
空	Emptiness
個人性・個別性	Individuality
国民	Nation, citizens [The tension between <i>kokumin</i> as an individual citizen and <i>kokumin</i> as an entire national totality is difficult to maintain in English.]
差別・無差別	Discriminateness/non-discriminateness
自己還帰	Self-return
実践的行為的連関	Practical interconnections through acts, practical interconnection of acts (Carter) [Carter’s translation tends to stress the linking of <i>acts</i> , but I think the stress should be on the linking of <i>subjects</i> through acts.]
主観・主観性	Subject, subjectivity [This is the epistemological subject, vs. the acting, embodied subject below.]
主体・主体性	Subject, agent, subjecticity (Berque: <i>subjectité</i>), <i>shutai</i>
真実・まこと	Truth, truthfulness

人間	<i>Ningen</i> , human [Again, it is necessary to maintain the tension between the individual human and humankind as a whole, which is why I leave this word untranslated.]
人倫・人倫的	<i>Sittlichkeit/Sittliche</i> , inter-human ethics, socio-ethical [Watsuji uses this word to translate Hegel, and so I maintain the German usage here. The second translation is too cumbersome, and the third brings in the notion of society, which would conflict with Watsuji's reading of Ferdinand Tönnies. However, the Japanese word also has meanings beyond the German, such as "human relations" or "humanity."]
絶対否定性	Absolute negativity
全体性	Totality, wholeness
存在	<i>Sonzai</i> , existence [Watsuji goes through great pains to distinguish his usage of <i>sonzai</i> from <i>Sein</i> or existence, which is why I leave this word untranslated.]
道理	Reason, the reason of the way
否定	Negation
風土・風土性・風土的	Milieu/milieuity/milieual [Bownas's translation of <i>fūdo</i> as "climate" tended to obscure the human aspect and overstress the environmental aspect. As Berque argues, "milieu" better captures the non-reductionist tension between subject and object in this lived space. However unlike Berque, I have no qualms with distorting English to include the conjugations of milieu.]
文化活動・文化産物	Cultural production (activity)/cultural products
法	Dharma
民族	Nation, ethnos, ethnic nation, <i>Volk</i>
明	Clarity

無	Nothingness, nothing [It is important to distinguish this from “emptiness, <i>kû</i> ,” as the words have different connotations, especially amongst members of the Kyoto School of Philosophy.]
滅する	To extinguish
歴史性	Historicity
わけ	Practical circumstances/demands

Watsuji’s Publications

- 1913 *Nietzsche Studies* (*Niche kenkyû*)
- 1915 *Søren Kierkegaard* (*Zêren Kierukegôru*)
- 1918 *Revival of Idols* (*Gûzô saikô*)
- 1919 *Pilgrimages to the Ancient Temples [in Nara]* (*Koji junrei*)
- 1920 *Ancient Japanese Culture* (*Nihon kodai bunka*)
- 1925 *The History of Buddhist Ethical Thought* (*Bukkyô rinri shisôshi*, 1925 was the purported lecture date, but publication was in 1963.)
- 1926 *Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit* (*Nihon seishinshi kenkyû*)
- 1926 *The Significance of Primitive Christianity in Cultural History* (*Genshi Kirisuto kyô no bunkashiteki igi*)
- 1927 *The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism* (*Genshi Bukkyô no jissen tetsugaku*)
- 1931 “Ethics” (“*Rinrigaku*”)
- 1934 *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* (*Ningen no gaku toshite no rinrigaku*)
- 1935 *Further Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit* (*Zoku Nihon seishinshi kenkyû*)
- 1935 *Milieu: Anthropological Considerations* (*Fûdo ningengakuteki kôsatsum*)

- 1935 *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason (Kanto jissen risei hihan)*
- 1937 *Ethics I (Rinrigaku jô)*
- 1937 *Mask and Persona (Men to persona)*
- 1938 *Person and Humanity (Jinkaku to Jinruisei)*
- 1938 *Confucius (Kôshi)*
- 1942 *Ethics II (Rinrigaku chû)*
- 1943 *The Thought on Reverence for the Emperor and Its Tradition (Sonnô shisô to sono dentô)*
- 1944 *The Way of the Japanese Subject and America's National Character (Nihon no shindô, Amerika no kokuminsei)*
- 1946 *Homeric Criticism (Homêros hihan)*
- 1948 *The Ethics of Polis-tical Ningen (Poristeki ningen no rinrigaku)*
- 1948 *Koeber Sensei (Kêber sensei)*
- 1948 *The Symbol of National Unity (Kokumin tôgô no shôchô)*
- 1950 *Pilgrimages to the Ancient Temples in Italy (Itaria koji junrei)*
- 1950 *National Isolation: Japan's Tragedy (Sakoku Nihon no higeki)*
- 1950 *The Pioneers of Modern Philosophy of History (Kindai rekishi tetsugaku no senkusha)*
- 1951 *Buried Japan (Umoreta Nihon)*
- 1952 *The History of Japanese Ethical Thought (Nihon rinri shisôshi)*
- 1955 *Studies on the History of Japanese Art: Kabuki and Ayatsuri Jôruri (Nihon geijutsushi kenkyû kabuki to ayatsuri jôruri)*
- 1955 *Katsura Imperial Villa: Considerations on the Construction Process (Katsura rikkyû seisaku katei no kôsatsu)*

Posthumous:

1961 *An Attempt at an Autobiography (Jijoden no kokoromi)*

1965 *To My Wife in my Homeland (Kokoku no tsuma e)*

1965 *The Ecliptic (Kôdô)*

1972 *A Journal of My First Travels (Hatsutabi no ki)*

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