

Relationality vs. Singularity: Between Care Ethics and Poststructuralism

When thinking about ethics and morality, one of the first problems we have to wrestle with is that of the moral subject. Who is the subject who thinks, decides, and judges what is good or what is bad? Both deontology (Immanuel Kant) and utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill) share their answer: the moral subject is the *individual*. Thus, the western ethical tradition, though often peppered with disputes between deontologists and utilitarians, is one individualist tradition.

However, there have been two clear attempts to break with that tradition. The first occurred with the development of *care ethics* (in response to the moral developmental theorist, Lawrence Kohlberg). The second was the development of *communitarianism* (which arose in response to the political philosopher, John Rawls). Care ethics and communitarianism have their similarities in the critique of the closed, autonomous, individual moral agent. This critique is something that both movements share with Watsuji Tetsurô. In Chaps. 2 and 3 of this book, we will examine these two movements in relation to Watsuji's ethics of emptiness, in order to see what Watsuji might contribute to the critique of liberal individualist ethics.

In this chapter, we will focus on Watsuji and care ethics. But in such an analysis, a crucial question is at stake: Is the moral agent rightly understood as *singular* or as *relational*? In order to approach this question, I will start with a careful examination of what Watsuji means by relationality (*aidagara*). I will then connect this to the ethics of care, making use of the research of Erin McCarthy. Through this, we will see a picture of

Watsuji as a care ethicist. But then, we will proceed to the *limits* of relationality—uniqueness, irreplaceability, *singularity*. Examining thinkers like Sueki Fumihiko and poststructuralists like Jean-Luc Nancy and Emmanuel Levinas, we consider if it is possible to account for *both* overlapping selves as well as otherness within Watsuji's own view of relationships.

2.1 RELATIONAL EXISTENCE

One of the core traits of Watsuji's ethics that makes it distinct from many forms of ethics we study in the Anglosphere is that Watsuji's ethics is *fundamentally* relational. "Fundamentally" means that Watsuji does *not* start with an individual moral agent, which subsequently enters into relationships. Rather, without relationships, there is no moral agent to speak of. What does this mean and how does Watsuji develop this idea?

Watsuji begins with the very process of asking ethical questions, as we are doing now. He asserts that when we ask ethical questions, something very special is happening. I, the author, am asking, (and hopefully you, the reader, are also asking) "What is ethics? What is *ningen*?" On the 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), or in a literal space like a school or a research room.

Even when I raise this question privately, the question is brought up within the *language*. I did not make up the words "what" or "is" or "ethics." Thus, in these words, relationality is at play. 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.

At this point, Watsuji says, *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.

Thinking, questioning, are often taken as a demonstration of the indubitable existence of the ego (as in Descartes' famous methodic doubt). Sometimes this is even developed into a solipsist position (I can

be sure that I exist because I am thinking, but I don't know if anyone else exists). However, Watsuji reads these acts in the complete opposite way: questioning shows how our individuality is fundamentally connected to others through shared language and concerns.¹ He writes: "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."²

What we see here is a completely different starting point:

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 the *I* is from the outset prescribed by its counterpart, which is also conversely prescribed by the former.³

This betweenness as a starting point applies not only to asking ethical questions but also to all our acts as human beings. For example, right now, I am writing. But my writing is always determined by possible readers—what kind of people would read my book? What parts might they find unclear? In the same way, the reader is perhaps at this point wondering what I am thinking, and what ideas I am trying to convey. The author is always determined by readers, and a reader is always determined by authors in a reciprocal determination and mutual dependency. Therefore, Watsuji does not even start with an independent author and an independent reader, who then have a relationship. Rather, "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."⁴

The same betweenness holds when 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.

Furthermore, Watsuji's view of *institutions* is centered around relationships, and at the same time, relationships always form and participate in institutions. For example, we can examine the school.

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.⁵

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.

An essential part of relationships that form and are formed by institutions is that they involve *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.⁶

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 the section entitled “Individual Moments Making up Human Existence,” Watsuji details how we relate to 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.”⁷

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, often, our moods are lifted as well. Furthermore, our perceptions of phenomena are altered by the way others perceive them—from grosser examples, like how the panic of others affects us even when we do not know what the panic is about, to more subtle examples, like the influence of language on how we see the world.

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 capacities, not merely as theoretical beings nor as mechanical functionaries, but as thinking, feeling, willing embodied subjects in emotional systems,⁸ 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.⁹

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 *aid-agara*: 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 paradox 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.

2.2 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 Graham Mayeda's *Time, Space, and Ethics in the Philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurō, Kuki Shūzō, and Martin Heidegger*. Also, in Steve 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").^{10, 11} Of all of these positive appraisals of Watsuji's theory, Erin McCarthy's *Ethics Embodied* (2010) stands out as one of the most interesting.

2.2.1 McCarthy's *Watsuji-ron*

In *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies*, McCarthy focuses on the connection between Watsuji, care ethics, and feminist ethics. She is particularly drawn to Watsuji's ethics of *aidagara*, which she sees as an ethics that is able to balance individuality and sociality in a way western philosophy often fails to:

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.¹²

This is none other than the "fundamentally relational" model of *ningen* we have clarified in this chapter.

According to McCarthy, Watsuji's approach to human existence focuses on the opposite of what the western tradition tends to focus on—intimacy rather than integrity. Here, she uses Thomas Kasulis' nomenclature: The

Western tradition tends to have an “integrity orientation”—focused on the integrity and autonomy of the self—whereas eastern traditions tend to have an “intimacy orientation”—that highlights the fundamental relatedness of “non-selves.”¹³ However, that does not mean that Watsuji has no counterpart in the West. Kasulis writes, “In a patriarchal society, of course, men would be taught to focus on the dominant orientation and this would leave the other orientation for the women.”¹⁴ That means that if Watsuji is an intimacy-oriented theorist, he would have connections with western *feminist* thought. McCarthy pursues this line of thinking and connects Watsuji to the ethics of care.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the ethics of care was born as a critique against Lawrence Kohlberg’s individualist view of moral development. Kohlberg, building on Jean Piaget’s work on the cognitive development of children, saw children as learning to be moral through a series of stages, through which they learned to reason about rules, roles, and institutions. There were six stages: the morality of obedience, of instrumental egoism, of interpersonal concordance, of law and duty, of consensus-building procedures, and finally, the morality of nonarbitrary social cooperation.¹⁵ What we see in these stages is a general movement from egoism (avoiding punishment and harm) to heteronomy (being nice or lawful), and finally to autonomy and justice (flexible consensus and rational cooperation). This resonates heavily with Immanuel Kant’s expressions of the categorical imperative—particularly, the Formula of Universal Law and the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends—a view that focuses on the *autonomous individual* as the moral agent. (That is not to say that Kohlberg ignored social relations, but similar to social contract theory, relations were forms of cooperation freely entered into by autonomous moral agents.)

There was one hiccup here: Kohlberg’s study originally focused on boys, and when he included girls, they tended to be placed at lower levels than boys their age. Are women less morally developed, less autonomous, than men? This did not sit well with Carol Gilligan, who was Kohlberg’s collaborator.

[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.¹⁶

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 to a network of relationships that support one's autonomy."¹⁷

This focus on interdependence and relationality is shared by Watsuji and ethics of care. Both models of ethics focus not on an abstract, autonomous, individual moral agent, but rather a self that is always already in relation, valuing, judging, and acting not from a point of view of isolation but from within those roles and relations. McCarthy cites Virginia Held, another ethicist of care, writing,

The ethics of care is, instead, hospitable to the relatedness of persons. It sees many of our responsibilities as not freely entered into but presented to us by the accidents of our embeddedness in familial and social and historical contexts. It often calls on us to take responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone.¹⁸

Watsuji and ethicists of care devote much time to discussing the family, particularly the mother–child relation, as a key model for ethical life. But that does not mean that care is confined to the private sphere. Rather, it extends all the way to the widest reaches of the public sphere. McCarthy writes about *global* care ethics as follows:

Held maintains that the ethics of care can specifically work toward extending caring to the global social and political realms ... If we begin, following Watsuji and care ethics, to rethink of the concept of person as relational, we see that "we cannot refuse obligation in human affairs by merely refusing to enter relation; we are, by virtue of our mutual humanity, already and perpetually in potential relation."¹⁹

This clearly resonates with the discussions in the previous chapter on "the community of one humankind" and the moral imperatives of world

history. As human beings in an interconnected world, we are all bound to each other by a potential to trust in and care for one another.

Thus, in McCarthy's *Embodied Ethics*, Watsuji can be seen as an ally of ethics of care. Both combat the forgetfulness of relationality 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.

2.2.2 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 attempts 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*.²⁰ 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 *ontic* fact of relationality, the *ontological* 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 relieve that pain."²¹ 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 Chap. 5 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.²² I see two questions Watsuji can be of help with: "Is care a virtue?" and "What is the proper relationship between care and justice?"

Usually, we think of "virtue" as belonging to an individual agent: *This* person is courageous, temperant, etc. Which is why care ethicists like Noddings have been critical of referring to care as a "virtue of being caring." 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*.²³

However, in *Ethics II*, Watsuji gives a completely different approach to virtue by arguing that virtues are 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. It would be foolish to think of marital harmony between a married woman and her boss, or economic service between brothers. For Watsuji, not only is care irreducible to virtue, it is the other way around—virtues are all emplaced *within* care. Relationships are 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 between parent and child is manifest through filial piety ... That which is called "filial duty" toward children is this "truthfulness." 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.²⁴

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.

Second, we have the question of justice vs. care. This is one of the core arguments of care ethics that began in Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg, where Gilligan argued for 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 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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 Chap. 4.)

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, Noddings's ideas on care, community, and moral education can provide very useful resonances with Watsuji's theories.²⁷ I leave these possible angles for a later time.

2.3 THE EXCESSES OF *AIDAGARA*

In the previous section, Erin McCarthy has provided us with a very fruitful lead to seek out the connections between Watsuji and care ethics. But there is one point where I feel McCarthy is too generous with Watsuji. Care ethics, particularly as a feminist ethic, requires an inclusion of the notion of “alterity” despite the focus on relations. It resists the tendency to reduce women, as the oft-marginalized “other” of man, into the totalizing framework of men:

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).²⁸

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 mentions times when Watsuji slips, she generally sees Watsuji’s concept of *ningen* as a space for non-totalizing communion. But does Watsuji’s ethics of *aidagara* really allow for both relationship as well as otherness?

Sakai Naoki, professor of Asian studies at Cornell University, would answer *no*. In his extended critique of Watsuji in *Translation and Subjectivity*, he argues that 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 wherein individuals are completely submerged in various roles.²⁹ But this is pushed to the extent that Watsuji ignores 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. He thus subordinates 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.³⁰

Some readers might be thinking that this scathing critique of Watsuji comes from an altogether foreign tradition of postcolonialism and post-structuralism, with its views of social justice, difference, and otherness fundamentally aligned with the western "integrity-oriented" tradition. If so, then that would fail to be an internal critique of Watsuji's ideas. But interestingly, Sueki Fumihiko gives a similar critique of Watsuji. Sueki's philosophy takes a fundamentally relational approach to human existence, one that is in agreement with Watsuji's "intimacy-oriented" ethics. Also, he takes a Buddhist approach, rather than the Judeo-Christian one common in philosophies of otherness. But despite this affinity with Watsuji's worldview, Sueki finds Watsuji's ethics of *ningen* fundamentally limited because it presupposes a world of mutual understanding and harmony, in which there is no room for the "other."³¹

Sueki writes,

The other is a "being" with which one must have some relationship yet which is impossible to understand. The other stands in contrast to *nin-gen*—human beings whose nature is premised upon mutual understanding of each other.

So far as the nature of the other is concerned, we know that the question of existence is not the primary problem. What is the most important, rather, is what kind of relationship it has to me. One might formulize this by saying that "relation comes before existence." It then follows that the other is more appropriately defined as "that which confronts me with a relationship that is incomprehensible to me."³²

The “other” refers to the aspect of ourselves, of other people, of nature, of the deceased, which we relate with but cannot reduce to a sense of harmony or rational order. Prior to its existence is the kind of *relationship* we have with it. Thus, it is possible to have a sense of alterity even in an ethics of intimacy. Which brings us back to the question, is there room in Watsuji’s ethics for this other? Might Watsuji not have gone too far with his idea of *aidagara* that he erased singularity and otherness altogether?

To address these questions, let us consider the development of relationality in *Ethics II*. As we have seen in Chap. 1, a key aspect of relationality is that all relationships are mediated by finite things that are shared. 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.

2.3.1 *Husband and Wife*

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.³³

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 of the two people, and that makes them into one communal existence ... Every nook and cranny of the two persons is formed. In the space between these two, “self” can no longer exist.³⁴

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.”³⁵ 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”³⁶ 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 their husbands.

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 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*.”³⁷

2.3.2 *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 international 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.³⁸

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 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.³⁹

Again, in this view of language, we see what Sueki warned us about—a world of mutual understanding in which there is no room for the incomprehensible other.

2.3.3 *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 idea of being-toward-death which spans the first two volumes of *Ethics*. As this is the central idea of this chapter, 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.

“The They” or the herd is how people usually view others, as a whole that they are dissolved into. The They are what people measure themselves against, the status quo that becomes their measure for themselves. However, for Heidegger, the They takes away our capacity to make decisions for ourselves and to own up to the decisions we make, it “disburdens” us.⁴⁰ As such, there is a need to retrieve oneself from the They. It is in this self-recovery that being-toward-death plays a crucial role.

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. 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: “Of course someone can ‘go to his death for another’. But ... ‘dying for’ can never signify that the Other has thus had his death taken away even in the slightest degree. Dying is something that every *Dasein* itself must take upon itself at the time.”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 ... 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.⁴³

Willingness to face death rouses one from her slumber among the They and makes one *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 Chap. 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, 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

Furthermore, for Watsuji, as a mere individual, preparedness for death cannot be of ultimate importance. "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."⁴⁸ 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*.⁴⁹

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 with others. Authentic existence is thus possible, not as the authentic individual, but as 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.⁵⁰

A thing that absolutely lacks publicness, that is, a thing that is essentially private, does not exist.⁵¹

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

2.4 HINTS FROM POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Perhaps the reader may be feeling, as I am, torn between the importance of authenticity in Heidegger and the validity (at least partially) of needing to go beyond individual authenticity to a sense of relation and care. Both theorists of “otherness” (including Sakai, Sueki, Heidegger), and theorists of relation have valid points, but these seem to run headlong into each other.

In the next section, I wish to suggest that there are other ways beyond the individualism of Heidegger that do not require a totalitarian focus on the community. We see this in two leading contemporary philosophers: 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 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.

2.4.1 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.⁵² 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*, the non-interchangeable, the unique. ... *Eigentlichkeit* to which all the meaningful can be traced. Primordial importance is attached to *one's own being*.⁵³

The idea of authenticity seems curiously self-involved, concerned with its own existence. 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, while this is technically correct, 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.⁵⁴

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?⁵⁵

In dying for another, 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.

In this way, Watsuji also shares this moment of being “beyond ontology.” However, if one looks carefully, this moment is quickly lost:

So long as the state is a *sittliche* organization, its endangerment (*kikyū*) is an endangerment of the way of *Sittlichkeit*. Bravery that [seeks to] rescue it is truly heroism (*giyū*) as *moral 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.⁵⁶

Death opens up the individual to the *undying* totality, the “we” (*ware ware*) in which the individual finds its eternal significance. It is not about going beyond being, but about going beyond individual being into collective being. 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."⁵⁷

This is in contrast with Levinas' idea of response or sacrifice as dislocation, a rupture of the "I" that is not an escape 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 a *substitution*:

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.⁵⁸

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.

2.4.2 *Jean-Luc Nancy*

On the 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 mineness of death in Heidegger, Watsuji rejected the possibility that there could remain something completely other even in the most intimate relationship.

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*.⁵⁹

In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy tries to describe a middle way between the excesses of community and the solitude of authentic *Dasein*. His starting point is 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.⁶⁰

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 the 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 itself to the community.

What does it mean for singularities to relate and form a community? First, Nancy points out what it is *not*—immanent community. He points to the 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.⁶¹

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 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 ...⁶²

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.⁶³

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).⁶⁴

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*. ... 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.”⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷ “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*.”⁶⁸

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.⁶⁹ 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 compare.⁷⁰

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."⁷¹ And third, I realize that while I am being-toward-death, the other is also being-toward-death. This 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

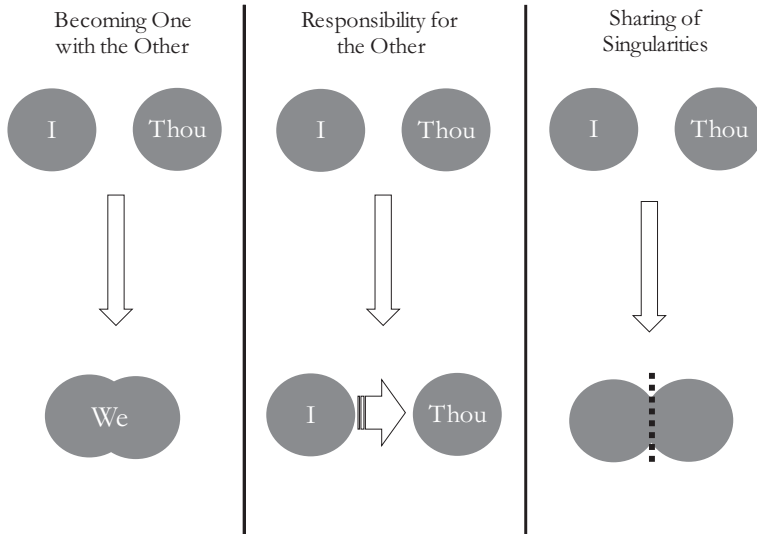


Fig. 2.1 The relationship of I and Thou

were another subject that would sublate me, in a dialectical or communal mode. *Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition.*⁷²

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 an inoperative community.

Nancy gives us a very different notion of betweenness and relation as a sharing that never becomes a closed union. (See Fig. 2.1.) Might this not give us an idea of *aidagara* that values caring without ignoring the otherness of the other?

2.5 RETHINKING 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 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.

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.

2.5.1 *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.⁷³

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 an 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.⁷⁴ [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:

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.⁷⁵

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.)

2.5.2 *Cultural Products and Production*

In the wartime volume of *Ethics*, Watsuji first discusses the idea of collective change—at least restricted within the 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 contain 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, 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.⁷⁶ 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 Chaps. 3 and 6.)

2.5.3 *The Prophet*

In the postwar 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, and ahead of the masses had tried to form things toward how they ought to be, thus leading collective consciousness to self-awareness.⁷⁷

“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 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 poststructural 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 the 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.

2.6 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 Sect. 2.1, 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*.

NOTES

1. *WTZ10*, 52 (50).
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 53–54 (51).
4. *Ibid.*, 55 (52).
5. *Ibid.*, 56–57 (53–54).
6. *Ibid.*, 61 (57).
7. *Ibid.*, 65 (62).
8. “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 among a group of people (particularly in a family or in a therapy group).
9. *WTZ10*, 61 (57–58).
10. Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 68–77 (Odin 1996).
11. 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 (Utsunomiya 1980).
12. Erin McCarthy, *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 13 (McCarthy 2010).
13. See Thomas Kasulis, *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002). 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 Chap. 4, and I have discussed Kasulis

- and Watsuji in greater detail in my essay “*Gaijin* Philosophy and the Problems of Universality and Culture” (Kasulis 2002).
14. Kasulis, 138.
 15. The descriptions of Kohlberg’s theory are from the following: Elizabeth C. Vozzola, *Moral Development: Theory and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 28–29 (Vozzola 2014).
 16. McCarthy, 56.
 17. Ibid., 57.
 18. Ibid., 58.
 19. Ibid., 64.
 20. “Shintaika sareta ‘kea no rinrigaku’ (1): Feminisuto tetsugaku to ‘Watsuji rinrigaku’ no hikaku tetsugakuteki kôatsu,” *Ibunka* (2014): 42–44 (Morimura 2014).
 21. Nel Noddings, *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002a), 17 (Noddings 2002a).
 22. 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/> (Sander-Staudt 2011).
 23. Noddings, 19.
 24. *WTZ10*, 401.
 25. Fiona Robinson. *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations*. Boulder (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 23–24 (Robinson 1999).
 26. Noddings, 22.
 27. See Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002b) (Noddings 2002b).
 28. Ibid., 80–81.
 29. 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 ningen-gaku* (Tokyo: Tôshindô, 2014) (Yano 2014).
 30. Sakai Naoki, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 96 (Sakai 1997).

31. Sueki Fumihiko, Anton Luis Sevilla (trans.), *Religion and Ethics at Odds: A Buddhist Counter-Position* (Nagoya: Chisokudô Publications, 2016), 92. I have also compared Sueki and Watsuji in Sevilla Anton, “Kû no rinrigaku ni okeru rinri to chôrinri: Sueki Fumihiko no Watsuji hihan o koete,” *Nishida tetsugakkai nenpô* 13 (2016): 101–115 (Fumihiko and Sevilla 2016; Sevilla 2016).
32. Sueki Fumihiko, Lynne Riggs (trans.), Anton Luis Sevilla (co-trans.), *Philosophy Live: A Perspective from Japan* (Kyoto: Nichibunken, 2017). Translation emended (Fumihiko 2017).
33. *WTZ10*, 335–336.
34. *Ibid.*, 337.
35. *Ibid.*, 341.
36. *Ibid.*, 379.
37. William R. LaFleur, “An Ethics of As-Is: State and Society in the Rinrigaku of Watsuji Tetsurô,” 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 (LaFleur 1994).
38. *WTZ10*, 529.
39. *Ibid.*, 528–529.
40. 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) (Heidegger 1962, 2010).
41. *Ibid.*, 245.
42. *Ibid.*, 240.
43. *Ibid.*, 250.
44. *Ibid.*, 262–263.
45. *WTZ10*, 236 (224).
46. *Ibid.*, 237 (225).
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, 238 (226).
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 332–333.
51. *Ibid.*, 333.
52. 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 (Krueger 2013; Kalmanson 2010).

53. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 211 (Levinas 1998).
54. Ibid., 216.
55. Ibid., 217.
56. *WTZ10*, 622.
57. Watsuji, *Fûdo*, 19–20 (10). Translation emended.
58. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 13–14 (Levinas 1981).
59. For some preliminary explorations on the relation between Watsuji's and Nancy's ideas, also see Anton Luis Sevilla, "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 (Sevilla 2012).
60. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7 (Nancy 1991).
61. Ibid., 9.
62. Ibid., 12.
63. 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, 'nanimo kyôyûshiteinai monotachi no kyôdôtai' no rinri ni nari uru ka?: Watsuji Tetsurô rinrigaku no genkai," *Ibunka ronbunhen* 11 (2010): 213–251 (Morimura 2010).
64. Nancy, 35.
65. Ibid., 15.
66. Ibid., 25.
67. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) (Nancy 2000).
68. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 29.
69. Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 180 (James 2006).
70. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 33.
71. Ibid., 33–34.
72. Ibid., 26–27.

73. *WTZ10*, 123–124 (116–117).
74. *Ibid.*, 129 (122).
75. *Ibid.*, 130 (123).
76. For example, see *Ibid.*, 520, 551, 560.
77. *WTZ11*, 64.

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