

Ontology or Ethics: The Case of Martin Heidegger and Watsuji Tetsurô

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Abstract: The title of this paper namely ‘Ontology or Ethics: The Case of Martin Heidegger and Watsuji Tetsurô,’ in principle, if not in fact, aims at shedding light on the relation between ethics and ontology. As a thesis, this paper claims that their relation boils down to the question of the being of the human being, which consequently and necessarily serves as the departure point towards answering the problems of ontology (i.e., the meaning of Being) and ethics (i.e., the rationale behind human relations). In trying to divulge the presuppositions underlying this claim, I will use Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological hermeneutics beginning from his analytic of *Dasein* and Watsuji Tetsurô’s ethics as the study of *ningen* (人間).

Keywords: Heidegger, Watsuji, ontology, ethics

Introduction

The title of this paper namely ‘Ontology or Ethics: The Case of Martin Heidegger and Watsuji Tetsurô,’ in principle, if not in fact, aims at shedding light on the relation between *ethics* and *ontology*. As a thesis, this paper initially claims that their relation boils down to the question of the being of the human being, which consequently and necessarily serves as the departure point towards answering the problems of ontology (i.e., the meaning of Being) and ethics (i.e., the rationale behind human relations). In trying to divulge the presuppositions underlying this claim, I will use Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological hermeneutics beginning from his analytic of *Dasein* and Watsuji Tetsurô’s ethics as the study of *ningen* (人間).

Having delineated such a task, two important matters must be addressed. First, what exactly do the terms ‘ontology’ and ‘ethics’ mean? The answer to this is drawn from Heidegger’s take on ontology as the inquiry

concerned in clarifying “the meaning of Being”¹ *for*² that entity—the inquirer—whose “definite characteristic” involves an “understanding of Being”³ and from Watsuji’s rendering of ethics as “the order or the pattern through which the communal existence of human being is rendered possible”⁴

From this horizon of discourse, the second concern could be derived—Why Heidegger and Watsuji? This question is to be treated in its three aspects: (a) a question of the individual significance of their discourses in relation to ontology and ethics, (b) a question of the significance of the *and* between Heidegger and Watsuji, or in other words, the question of the relation of their thoughts to one another, and (c) a question of the merit of comparing their thoughts as regards the question of the relation between ontology and ethics.

The Heidegger-Watsuji Relation

In response to the question of the significance of Heidegger and Watsuji’s thoughts on the basic trajectory of ontology and ethics, it is to be said that the reason for choosing them is on one part historical (i.e., history of philosophy), and another, cultural (i.e., they are coming from different cultural orientations). The historical reason is focused on Heidegger’s ontology as having been able to create a break within Western philosophy in his delimitation of the question of Being. Heidegger, in his magnum opus *Being and Time*, restructures the question as a question, which essentially begins in the question of the being of the inquirer itself. This inquirer, whom Heidegger calls *Dasein*, is for him the very condition for the possibility of any conception or understanding of Being. Heidegger writes,

... to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (USA: Harperperennial Modernthought, 2008), 19/1; 31/11. Hereafter cited as *BT*, followed by the page number as found in the Maquarrie-Robinson translation, and the page number in the German edition as indicated in the margins of the translation.

² The italicization of the preposition *for* is in order to remain consistent to Heidegger’s delimitation of Being as the category or the lens from which we experience or think about anything. It is not an abstract autonomous concept that makes possible existence, but rather something like a transcendental category of thought used to designate or refer to that which exists, or to existence in general. As a category of thought, it is of major importance to stress that for Heidegger, Being necessarily becomes an always and already Being *for* an inquirer.

³ Heidegger, *BT*, 32/12.

⁴ Watsuji Tetsuro, *Watsuji Tetsuro’s Rinrigaku*, trans. by Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 11. Hereafter cited as *WTR* followed by the page number.

own being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of *being*; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about—namely, Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being, we shall denote by the term *Dasein*.⁵

The being (way of existence) of this *Dasein* which Heidegger refers to as the being (entity, existent) whose being (way of existence) involves inquiring about Being (category of thought referring to that which exists), is for Heidegger, what must first be elaborated as a preliminary step before one can go on and inquire about Being in general. He points out, that “the ontological analytic of *Dasein* in general is what makes up fundamental ontology, so that *Dasein* functions as that entity which in principle is to be *interrogated* beforehand as to its being.”⁶ This delimitation of Heidegger about this foundational concept of Metaphysics is in itself a breakthrough in philosophy that it transformed what was known as Metaphysics into ‘ontology.’⁷ It has re-appropriated the question of Being to that being only for whom Being makes sense. In other words, the question of Being for Heidegger becomes an anthropocentric question. It is in this way that Heidegger's thought as one of those philosophies, which directly confronted the question of Being, receives a special place in ontology.

The choice of Watsuji, on the other hand, is cultural insofar as he is an Eastern thinker who actually presented a systematic thesis and book on ethics. Watsuji, a Japanese philosopher who, like his contemporaries, also went to Germany to study philosophy, was likewise influenced by the systematic approach of Western philosophy while embodying Eastern values. Adopting Watsuji's perspective is like taking an outsider's point of

⁵ Heidegger, *BT*, 27/7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35/14.

⁷ This statement departs from the standpoint that at least for Heidegger, Metaphysics had been pinned down to the idea of man as the ‘rational animal’. He writes in his book *What is called thinking*, “Man conceived as the rational animal is the physical exceeding the physical”—that is, man raising himself above the animal, the sensual, the physical that he is, through reason,—“in short: in the nature of man as the rational animal, there is the passing from the physical to the non-physical, the supra-physical: thus man himself is the metaphysical.” Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Perennial, 2004), 58. Hereafter cited as *WT*, followed by the page number.

On a side note, it must be pointed out that the relation of Heidegger to the philosophical tradition that deals with ethics could be linked with the criticisms his philosophy received, most particularly that of Levinas' which is summed in the expression “ontological imperialism,” and the fascist tendencies of his thinking which are often being connected to his Nazi affiliation. However, since this is not the issue of the paper, the discussion on this topic is suspended.

view that is not simply critical towards Heidegger from within his tradition, but rather from a different philosophical idiom.

Graham Mayeda, in her book *Time, Space and Ethics in the Philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurô, Kuki Shuzo, and Martin Heidegger*, argues that although already contained within Heidegger's discussions in *Being and Time*, the 'social nature' of existence was less emphasized by Heidegger, and it is from this that the extension of Heidegger's discourse by Watsuji (and also by Kuki Shuzo) comes with great significance.⁸ Mayeda adds that Watsuji was able to pick up Heidegger's tendency towards individualism and through his critique, was able to stress the importance and primordality of the social dimension of existence.

To elucidate further the point of choosing Watsuji as the counterpart of Heidegger, the second aspect of the question must be probed, namely: Why Heidegger and Watsuji? Aside from direct references by Watsuji to Heidegger's philosophy in his work *Rinrigaku (Ethics as the Study of Ningen)*, the influence of Heidegger to Watsuji's style of writing and method of thinking and explaining could be greatly observed.⁹ Given that Heidegger's hermeneutic and phenomenological approach to philosophy during that time had been very prominent amongst the Japanese thinkers, Watsuji was not spared from the Heideggerian influence. Such reception of Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein* sat well with the developing philosophy of *ningen sonzai* (人間存在) in Japan, and this is one of the main reasons why Watsuji, who was one of the pioneering thinkers of this philosophy, receives special attention when dealing with the ethical import of Heidegger's philosophy. Meanwhile, also in a very similar fashion to Heidegger's philosophical career, Watsuji was at the same time alleged to have committed to nationalistic ideologies during the turbulent periods in Japan. The accusation was an effect of his reactions against Western imperialism of East Asia and Japanese imperialism and nationalism, which simultaneously occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Japan. It is precisely because of such allegation that Watsuji's works on ethics¹⁰ had in way been questioned in the same fashion that Heidegger's *Being and Time* was stripped off of its merit at the outbreak of the Heideggerian-Nazi controversy.

⁸ See Mayeda, Graham, *Time, Space and Ethics in the Philosophy of Watsuji Tetsuro, Kuki Shuzo, and Martin Heidegger* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁹ During Watsuji's time, Heidegger's influence in Japan was wide ranging. His hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches had been very influential to the Japanese thinkers and Watsuji was included in such epochal disposition. In 1927, when Watsuji studied in Germany, he also read the newly published *Being and Time*.

¹⁰ This includes an essay entitled *Ethics*, which he wrote in 1931, an expansion of such treatise in *Ethics as the Study of Ningen* published in 1934, and a three-volume work also entitled *Ethics* published in 1934, 1942, and 1949.

Such direct influence between Watsuji and Heidegger; the ethical import Watsuji was able to draw from Heidegger's philosophy; the divergence of Watsuji's culture and thought tradition from Heidegger's; and their political issues are the very reasons why this paper picks up Watsuji as a philosopher who could help give insights on the relation of ethics to ontology, particularly to that of Heidegger's ontology.

Heidegger: Ontology and the Analytic of *Dasein*

What is the structure of being of that being who "is in such a way as to be something which understands something like Being"?¹¹ This is the overarching theme of the written and published portion of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*—a work intended to be of two parts but which ended up completing only its preliminary task: "the interrogation of those entities which have the character of *Dasein*."¹² As has been pointed out, for Heidegger, the interrogation of *Dasein's* way of being is in order to set properly the grounds from which the inquiry about *Being* could be undertaken. But what does Heidegger mean by the term *Dasein*?

Heidegger refers to the being of man as *Dasein*. The term is a combination of two terms, *da* and *sein*, which literally means 'being-there' and refers to the being of persons in contrast to the being of entities (of things).¹³ For Heidegger the meaning of *Dasein's* existence is "temporality."¹⁴ This simply means that its structural way of being is to be 'in time.'¹⁵ At the very onset, Heidegger already demarcates that time is the horizon for any interpretation of Being. "Time," he says, is "the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it."¹⁶ Therefore, if *Dasein* means 'being-there' and being 'in-time,' the term acquires the meaning: 'being-there-in-time.' It is under this sense that this paper approaches Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein* in terms of temporality. Insofar as his *Being and Time* is concerned, this paper argues that Heidegger presented three dimensions of temporal existence: *being-in-the-world*, *being-with*, and *being-towards-death*.

Being-in-the-world is the basic existential structure of *Dasein*. It signifies that *Dasein* is "thrown into a there"¹⁷ within which he is born, is

¹¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 39/17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 65/41.

¹³ However, in traditional German philosophy, *Dasein* would generally refer to the Being or existence of any thing. (See footnote 1 in *Being and Time*, Macquarrie-Robinson translation, 27). The difference between being and entities is of prime distinction for Heidegger. It is what scholars refer to as the 'ontological difference.'

¹⁴ Heidegger, *BT*, 38/17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39/18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39/17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 344/297.

raised, dwells, and dies. This 'there' is the world. This 'world,' for Heidegger, is not a physical place wherein one simply stands, moves, or wanders about, but rather, a relational space 'within which' one encounters things in their 'manipulability' and 'presence'¹⁸ and it is what gives them their connectedness. Heidegger distinguishes this world from three other senses of the world, namely: the world as "the totality of entities," the world as "the being of such totality," and the world as "the general concept that embraces all possible worlds."¹⁹ In presenting *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, Heidegger designates the world as the world of familiarity. It is the world wherein "the factual *Dasein* can be said to live,"²⁰ and from which *Dasein* derives its basic intelligibility and sense of anything. It is the world closest to it, which it could claim as *its* world, but which it has not created on its own. This signification implies that beforehand, there is already a relational context of things and individuals into which one can only be factually submitted. As Heidegger writes, "Dasein, insofar as it *is*, has always submitted itself already to this 'world' which it encounters, and this *submission* belongs essentially to its being."²¹ As such, it is only when one learns to participate within this "system of relations"²² that one starts owning such world. In this sense, in Heidegger's perspective, as many as there are individual *Daseins*, so there shall be as many worlds. And this world is the 'within which' that makes the coherence of our experience possible.²³ Heidegger argues: "*Dasein's* understanding of Being pertains with equal primordially both to an understanding of something like a 'world,' and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world."²⁴ This means that insofar as *Dasein* has an understanding of Being, this understanding is always within the context of a 'world.'

As a being thrown in a world, Heidegger characterizes such 'being-in' as a 'being-with' (the second dimension of temporality). This signifies that as one lives in a world, one encounters things, but along with things, one likewise encounters people. He writes,

¹⁸ In the Macquarrie-Robinson translation, 'manipulability' and 'presence' are respectively translated as 'readiness-to-hand' and 'presence-at-hand.' However, for the sake of clarity, I will use 'manipulability' and 'presence' in order to have a signification that is closer to an English reader.

¹⁹ Heidegger's discussion of the worldhood of the world is the theme of *Being and Time's* Division I, Chapter III. The four significations of the world are found in Section 14 Heidegger, *BT*, 93/64-65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93/64-65.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 120-121/87.

²² *Ibid.*, 122/88.

²³ Joan Stambaugh, "A Heidegger Primer," in *Philosophy Today*, 19:2-4 (1975), 81.

²⁴ Heidegger, *BT*, 33/13.

If [something] is manipulable, then there lies in the kind of Being which belongs to it (that is, in its involvement) an essential assignment or reference to possible wearers, for instance, for whom it should be 'cut to figure.' Similarly, when material is put to use, we encounter its producer or 'supplier' as one who 'serves' well or badly.²⁵

Heidegger, in trying to uncover the 'who' of *Dasein*, turns to who *Dasein* is proximally and for the most part. For him, this is nothing but to ask: "Who is it that *Dasein* is in its everydayness?"²⁶

In laying bare the answer to this question, Heidegger presents that the structure of *Dasein*'s being in its everydayness manifests as a 'being-with' (*Mitsein*) and '*Dasein*-with' (*Mitdasein*). He discusses that these structural items of being-in-the-world highlight the fact that along with the equipment to be found when one is working on something, those others 'for whom' the work is destined are encountered too.²⁷ This dimension of *Dasein*'s existence highlights the social belongingness of human life. The world, within which we encounter things, is the same world within which we encounter others who have the same kind of being as us (*Dasein*). It is not only things that are present in this world but human beings as well. *Dasein*, in existing in the world, is essentially with others. *Dasein* is a *Dasein*-with others. Heidegger argues that "knowing oneself" is grounded in this "being-with."²⁸ As we are always within a world-context, we also are always within a social-context. In every conceptual and practical activity one engages into, one always already participates within a social whole. He stresses: "even if the particular factual *Dasein* does *not* turn to others, and supposes that it has no need of them or manages to get along without them, it *is* in the way of being-with."²⁹ Under this signification, *Dasein* can only come to know itself as someone who is with-others and as such, that the world is disclosed to it as a "with-world"³⁰— it is always 'with' things, always 'with' people. The very reason why it can have any conception of the world at all is because of this 'with-ness.' In understanding the *who* of *Dasein*, one should not fall into the trap of conceiving it as an isolated "I" in that it could be understood apart from its relation with others. Understanding who one is, apart from one's relation to others with whom one is primarily socialized is impossible, for even isolation

²⁵ Heidegger, *BT*, 153/117. Translation modified.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149/114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 153/117.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 160/124.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 160/125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 155/118.

is still based on the understanding that one is initially 'with' others. Heidegger stresses, "even *Dasein's* Being-alone is Being-with; [...] it is simply a deficient mode of being-with."³¹ For Heidegger, we are inescapably social beings.

However, although this signifies our primordial embeddedness in a society, it is also against this backdrop of being-with that Heidegger starts to run through his distinction between the authentic self and the *they-self* (*das Man*). He stresses that precisely because the world is always a world we share with others, our being as individual *Daseins* can so easily be dissolved into the kind of being of others, in such a way that we become simply inscribed in the *they* and assume an inauthentic self which is the *they-self*. This *they-self*, for Heidegger, is the kind of being we, in our everyday life, inhabit.³² In this way of existing, we simply "take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking."³³ In the *they-self* we become "lost in ... publicness"³⁴ He writes,

Publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and *Dasein* gets interpreted, and it is always right ... because it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets to the 'heart of the matter.' By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone.³⁵

Heidegger argues that, "*Dasein* always understands itself in terms of its existence," that is, "in terms of a possibility of itself; to be itself or not itself."³⁶ In being itself, *Dasein* lives authentically. In *not* being itself, *Dasein* lives inauthentically. As has been pointed out though, in its everydayness, *Dasein* is a being-with. And as a being-with, *Dasein* exists just the way others exist. The public way of doing and interpreting things by virtue of our being thrown in a society we never choose becomes an integral aspect in shaping our being, our decisions, actions, outlook; it shapes our life. Averagely, we act according to standards or traditions. How people around us use and view things will be the way we use and see things precisely because our being

³¹ *Ibid.*, 156-7/120.

³² *Ibid.*, 224/179.

³³ *Ibid.*, 164/126-127.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 220/176.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 165/127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33/13.

constitutes a certain kind of passivity with regard to the world and the society we have grown in. Inauthenticity, characterized by our absorption in the world when we engage in work, when we are busy, excited, or ready for enjoyment, is what dominates how we are every day. In our everydayness we exist as *they*-self.

In no case is a *Dasein*, untouched and unsexed by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a 'world-in-itself' so that it just beholds what it encounters. The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a disposition – that is, for the basic way in which *Dasein* lets the world "matter" to it. The *they* prescribes one's disposition and determines what and how one 'sees.'³⁷

In the public way of interpreting things, "Things are so, because the *they* says so."³⁸ Here, it seems that the *they* is being signified by Heidegger in a pejorative sense and gives the impression that Heidegger is altogether hostile to public life.³⁹ However, just like language is an essential aspect of our life that is in itself a product of this sense of 'public understanding,' the force of this anonymous public to which we belong and which we ourselves constitute is something that is impossible to exist without. An average understanding, as a result of this, is something that *Dasein* has grown in, with no possibility of extrication.⁴⁰ In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed.⁴¹ This is the basic facticity into which *Dasein* has been thrown⁴² and *fallen*⁴³ Harrison Hall, explains this phenomenon and writes:

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 213/169-170. Translation modified.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 212/168.

³⁹ Richard Polt, in his introductory book to Heidegger's philosophy, makes a good explanation for this confusion and differentiates the '*they*' as an existential and the '*they*-self' as a modification of the '*they*.' He argues that the '*they*' is constant: the '*they*' is *always* familiar with a range of social expectations and interpretations that mark it as belonging to a culture. Meanwhile, when one exists as the '*they*-self,' as one would most of the time, one simply accepts these expectations and interpretations, and lets one's world be structured by them. From this delineation, one could understand then that the '*they*' as an existential is a mode of *Dasein*'s existence and that the '*they*-self' and the authentic self are but modifications of the '*they*.' See Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ Heidegger, *BT*, 213/169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 223/179.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 220/176.

For Heidegger, we are always choosing from among the cultural possibilities and against the cultural background of intelligibility into which we have been thrown. That is, we are always understanding (taking a stand on) our being on the basis of our thrownness or facticity. Human being is essentially self-interpreting being (in-the-world). But for the most part this self-interpreting is not only implicit – it is anonymous ('public' in Kierkegaard's sense). We choose, frequently without realizing we are choosing to do 'what *they* do' ... But when we choose to interpret our being in the public way – living in the world of the *they* [das Man], doing 'what *they* do' because it is either the 'right' or the comfortable thing to do – we 'fall' into the inauthentic way of being (BT 221-224).⁴⁴

In this sense, although *Dasein's* being-with implies our belongingness to communal life, it also implies our sense of passivity to the community we belong to. In being embedded in a social community, our tendency is to simply assume the public way of doing and understanding things. This is where the third dimension and ultimate form of temporality comes with great significance—for it is here where Heidegger delineates how *Dasein* could possibly and actually reclaim itself from its lostness—i.e., *Dasein's* realization of itself as a 'being-towards-death.'

Being inscribed in time, Heidegger remarks, means that one is already "old enough to die."⁴⁵ Death he says is "the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there."⁴⁶ It is, as he writes, the "possibility of absolute impossibility."⁴⁷ Heidegger furthers: "As possibility, death gives *Dasein* nothing to be 'actualized,' nothing which *Dasein*, as actual, could itself *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing."⁴⁸ It is the end of existence and as such, the end of projection and comportment. Heidegger, in presenting the possibilities of existence in terms of ontical and ontological possibilities,⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Harrison Hall, "Intentionality and World: Division I of Being and Time", in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Charles Guignon, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 137.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, *BT*, 289/245.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 294/250.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 294/250.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 307/262.

⁴⁹ Ontical possibilities are the social roles we assume in our particular lives as specific individuals, i.e. as student, daughter, teacher, etc. The ontological possibilities, on the other hand,

uses two phenomena through which authenticity becomes possible, namely: anxiety and death.

Anxiety and the 'anticipation' of an impending death are the very keys, which Heidegger outlines as that which can be used against the enveloping dominion of the *they*-self. Among the two, Heidegger first presents anxiety as the kind of disposition that is capable of individualizing *Dasein*. He argues that in anxiety, the world as a system of relations, a network of significance, a world with others, simply shrinks away. Anxiety, as an unease about one's being-in-the-world, brings *Dasein* "face to face with its *being-free* for the authenticity of its being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is."⁵⁰ He explains,

That which anxiety is anxious about is being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety what is environmentally manipulable sinks away and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The 'world' can offer nothing more, and neither can the *Dasein*-with of others. Anxiety thus takes away from *Dasein* the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. Anxiety throws *Dasein* back upon that which it is anxious about – its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes *Dasein* for its ownmost being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities.⁵¹

Meanwhile, the other phenomenon that opens the possibility for *Dasein* to be its authentic self, i.e., anticipation, is that experience which for him "one becomes free *for* one's own death."⁵² As it is in anxiety, the uncanniness one feels in the experience of death, as the experience of being face to face with oneself, is the very experience that individualizes man from this social absorption. It opens the utter reality that existence is not an infinite expansion and that in just one uncertain moment, it can be curtailed by death. Such being-towards-death epitomizes how *Dasein* as being-in is a being-in-time. Heidegger notes,

refer to a typology of *Daseins'* way of being, which have been referred earlier as the authentic self and the *they* or inauthentic self.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *BT*, 232/188.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 232/187.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 308/264.

Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the 'they self,' and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned *freedom towards death*—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the *they*, and which is factual, certain of itself and anxious.⁵³

This theme of death in relation to authenticity and inauthenticity is very critical for Heidegger. Inauthenticity, which he describes as our everyday way of being and constitutes our being-among-one-another, including our absorption to the *they*-self, is our way of being simply submitted to the general category of 'society' instead of being 'members' of a society. It is then against this backdrop of inauthenticity that Heidegger divulges the counter attitude or self-determination of *Dasein* that at once makes *Dasein* authentic, i.e., resoluteness. "Resoluteness," he says, "signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the *they*."⁵⁴ Through it, *Dasein* projects towards its "ownmost Being-guilty" in being lost in the publicness of the *they*.⁵⁵ It is the counter approach to life, characterized by being directed by an undying passion for something that is at the very core for 'one's own life.' In the experience of realizing death and anxiety, the *they*, which we normally appeal to, but which is precisely 'no one,' cannot offer any assistance. We are simply brought 'face to face with ourselves' and are at once individuated. Heidegger makes it clear that no one can take our dying away from us.⁵⁶ At the moment of death, we alone shall face it, and this is similar with life. Inasmuch as no one can *die for* us, no one could also *live for* us. Such is the very root of his call for authenticity. As individuals, we must be resolute enough to 'free' ourselves from the 'illusory' comforts of norms and conventions, and 'seize' the possibilities provided for by our facticity. In resoluteness, one is resolved to reaffirm and defend that which one resolves at, against one's tendency to fall back to irresoluteness and inauthenticity. To be resolute in one moment, like the sense we get when one speaks of a New Year's resolution, is never enough. It is a constant struggle to become someone you choose to. It is a battle of maintaining oneself in resolution, ready and open for the possibilities of life; resolute in choosing one possibility among the many with an understanding of one's utmost capacities and

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 311/266.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 346/299.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 343/297.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 284/240.

potentialities. It involves an understanding of one's Situation⁵⁷ as a thrown and finite individual, who must seize and make the most out of one's life. Resoluteness is the way of being whereby we can embrace the finitude of our existence and project towards what is significant for us, finally *free* to face, with all uncanniness and anxiety, the being that is us, "a being in time."

Resolution, however, is not rigid stubbornness.⁵⁸ An authentic person is free to change her mind—but she will do so only because she lucidly grasps her Situation in relation to who she chooses to be, and not because of whim, cowardice, or social pressures.⁵⁹ To be resolute is not at all a kind of rebellious decision to deviate from the average way of interpreting and dealing with things. Although Heidegger's writing gives the reader this impression, what Heidegger aims to emphasize is one's ability to be oneself and own one's actions, be responsible for it, even if one can never have the power over what is initially given. It is not an empty decision to be different; even following one's tradition and having the same view of things with others are still accounted for as authentic expressions of oneself as long as one understands these practices, understands them in relation to one's self-determination. It requires a sense of assessment of the things one considers significant and a kind of self-understanding of one's potentialities-for-Being. Heidegger, in this sense, affirms that resolutions remain dependent upon the *they* and its world.⁶⁰ Resoluteness, as an authentic being-one's-Self, does not detach *Dasein* from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating "I."⁶¹ The resolution *Dasein* asserts is precisely a disclosive projection of how one uniquely and firmly assumes, appropriates, and co-determines one's own social, cultural, and historical determination. *Dasein* is an embodiment of the society itself and is determined by it, but it is at the same time a singular being capable of fashioning its own way of being a confluence of different forces of influence.

Authentic being one's self in the sense of resoluteness then does not signify here an exceptional condition for *Dasein* that has been 'detached' from the *they*. This means that since the *they*-self signifies not only our passive absorption to the social whole but also our very belongingness to such relational existence, being authentic means not simply succumbing to the dictates of public life but instead, participating actively in the formation of one's own existence and life. Thus, Heidegger writes,

⁵⁷ Situation with a capital "s" is contrasted with what Heidegger calls as 'general situation.' In the latter, the inauthentic individual only sees what is general based on his average understanding of things. The authentic *Dasein*, however, understands his Situation that he is a thrown individual who can project and own up the possibilities provided for by his thrownness.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *BT*, 355/307-8.

⁵⁹ Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, 91.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 345-6/299.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 344/298.

The term 'irresoluteness' merely expresses that phenomenon which we have interpreted as a being-surrendered to the way in which things have been prevalently interpreted by the 'they.' *Dasein* as the *they*-self, gets 'lived' by the common-sense ambiguity of that publicness in which nobody resolves upon anything but which has always made its decision. "Resoluteness" signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the "they."⁶²

As such, resoluteness makes *Dasein* the *Dasein* that he is: a being thrown in a world where he encounters things and people, who like him, have as their way of being the capacity to make sense of their lives inasmuch as existence is not an endless and pre-determined feat. It is under this sense of ontology as first probing into human existence that Heidegger's statement in his later work gains relevance: "Every philosophical doctrine of man's essential nature is *in itself* a doctrine of the Being of beings. Every doctrine of Being is *in itself alone* a doctrine of man's essential nature."⁶³ The human being, as the departure point in uncovering the meaning of Being, for Heidegger, receives a very crucial place, and as such becomes the very foundation of his fundamental ontology.

Watsuji: Ethics as the study of *Ningen* (人間)

The main problem that Watsuji undertakes in his philosophical engagement is the question of ethics. In the beginning of his book *Rinrigaku*, he argues that the problem of modern ethics is its tendency towards individualism.⁶⁴ For this, he claims that individuality constitutes only one moment of the existence of human beings. Watsuji, in opening the vista for a systematic conception of ethics, immediately pinned down the question of ethics as precisely the question of the "laws of the social existence of *ningen* (人間)."⁶⁵ *Ningen* (人間), as the Japanese term for the human being, is the *subject* who inquires precisely about the question of ethics, and is also that which is itself being inquired about. For Watsuji, ethics, therefore, as primarily focused on the being of the individual subject, is at the same time anchored on the communal subject. Watsuji refers to this character of the human subject as

⁶² *Ibid.*, 346/299.

⁶³ Heidegger, *WT*, 79.

⁶⁴ Watsuji, *WTR*, 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

‘subjective community,’ which points to the human subject being an embodiment of the interconnection of human acts within a community.

In his *Rinrigaku*, Watsuji begins with the statement: “The locus of ethical problems lies not in the consciousness of the isolated individual, but precisely in the in-betweenness of person and person. Because of this, ethics is the study of *ningen* (人間).”⁶⁶ *Rinri* (倫理), as Watsuji interprets, is the Japanese term for ‘ethics.’ It is a compound term that is composed of the two characters *rin* (倫) and *ri* (理). *Rin* (倫) refers to *nakama*, which means ‘fellows,’ and *ri* (理) signifies ‘order,’ literally: ‘order of fellowship.’

Nakama (仲間), for Watsuji, signifies ‘a body, or a system of relations’ that a definite group of persons have with one another, but not only that; it also denotes the ‘individual persons’ within this system. He traces this to the Chinese Five Relationships wherein he sees that the relationships ruler-subject, husband-wife, senior brother-junior brother, senior friend-junior friend, father-son all define a particular and unitary belongingness with one another. For him, one can draw from the Five Relationships the signification that a ‘relationship’ is *constituted by* persons, and that it is that which *constitutes* the persons within the relationship. This means that, for instance, in the father-son relation, their fellowship as two individuals forming a unique kind of relationship (father-son) presents that every relationship ‘constitutes a being with another person’: a person being with another person. Moreover, the fellowship ‘constitutes the individuals’ inasmuch as it is only in that relationship that the father can actually be a father to a son, and the son, be a son to a father. In this sense, as Watsuji explains, *rin* (倫, fellowship) then signifies “the manner of interaction through which people have definite practical connections with each other.”⁶⁷ *Rin* (倫) is that which connotes individuals’ ‘relatedness’ in a given social sphere.

In conceiving fellowship as such, one cannot discount the fact that within that connection, there emerges a distinct manner of action which the persons involved undertake. This is what is meant by the second character *ri* (理). It signifies the ‘reason’ or ‘order’ or relational ‘pattern’ which appears as a repeated and exclusive way of interacting with each other carried out by persons within a particular relationship, and which varies from one relationship to another.

From the combined senses of the two characters *rin* and *ri*, Watsuji then defines *rinri* as “the order or the pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible.”⁶⁸ As the Japanese term that denotes ethics, *rinri* suggests the interconnectedness of people within a society characterized by a dynamic relational pattern that governs human

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

existence. It is the given order of fellowship in a community, which manifests a certain sense of being with one another.

It is exactly from this meaning of ethics that Watsuji draws his stand as regards the connection of is and ought, or in Western paradigm, of ontology and ethics. For him, "human existence as such infinitely aims at the realization of communal existence by virtue of the fact that human beings are *ningen* (人間)."⁶⁹ The relational patterns involved in social existence, he claims, are not to be treated simply as given laws that are fixed and complete in themselves. They are rather to be 'infinitely' aimed at. Watsuji stresses that although the pattern of practical connections is already realized, it is at the same time "a pattern yet to be achieved."⁷⁰ Although ethics is already what *is*, in the sense of what Watsuji calls 'laws of social existence' or our primary way of relating with one another, it is also regarded as what *should* be achieved 'infinitely.'⁷¹ The derivation of this standpoint of Watsuji comes from the fact that such 'law' is actually an unwritten law, whose sole support lies in the mutual will of individuals within a relationship to act in such manner repeatedly. Once one of them breaks off that sense of agreement, the 'lawness' of the relational pattern at the same time disintegrates.⁷² Thus for Watsuji, inasmuch as *rinri* (倫理) is what *is*, it is also what *ought*.

Rinri (倫理) without the human beings which it interconnects, however, is not possible. This leads to another major term used by Watsuji in his ethical system: *ningen* (人間). What precisely does he mean by *ningen*? *Ningen* (人間) is also a compound term composed of two characters: *hito* (人) meaning man, and *gen* or *aida* (間) meaning betweenness, literally 'man-in-betweenness.' It was mentioned earlier that for Watsuji, ethics is at once a 'study of *ningen* (人間).' If we take the literal meaning of *ningen* (人間) it would signify man, and the study of *ningen* (人間) or the study of man would be anthropology. However, Watsuji emphasizes that this literal meaning does not necessarily fully coincide with the Japanese connotation of the term. For the Japanese and for him, the meaning of the term *ningen* (人間) presents a very crucial dimension of the existence of man that is not immediately implied by the English term 'anthropology.' This is the "betweenness of human beings, that is, the 'public.'"⁷³ Watsuji points out that this sense of publicness inscribed in the term is the connotation used in classic Japanese literature most especially in Buddhist sutras. However, as time went by, this signification also transformed and came to signify the 'individual.' From

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² This can be understood in the sense of a son disobeying his father, for instance, or a broken marriage, or in the betrayal of loyalties between a ruler-subject relation.

⁷³ Watsuji, *WTR*, 14.

here, Watsuji then takes these two senses of the term as ‘public, social, or communal,’ and ‘individual’ and uses them as the basis for what he states as the dual-structure of the nature of *ningen* (人間): as both an individual and a member of the society.⁷⁴

It is in here that Watsuji makes a crucial distinction. He stresses that *ningen* (人間) as an individual differs completely from society. As an ‘individual,’ *ningen* (人間) is truly the individual person that is within a society. But, insofar as *ningen* (人間) also refers to the public, it is also the ‘community’ which exists between person and person, and thus signifying ‘society’ as well and not just isolated human beings.⁷⁵ This complex nature of *ningen* (人間) is what led Watsuji to assert that it refers not merely to an individual ‘human being’ nor merely to ‘society’ but to both. Individuals are basically different from the society and yet as they also constitute the society, they also are the society. The term *ningen* (人間), insofar as it refers to individuals singly, also refers to them generally, or better yet, publicly.

This dual structure of *ningen* (人間) as being both individual and social is referred to by Watsuji as “the absolute totality of *ningen* (人間).”⁷⁶ For Watsuji, this double structure of *ningen* (人間) reveals that it is precisely “a movement of negation”⁷⁷ that is constitutive of two moments: the negation of the totality of *ningen* (人間) in order to arrive at individuality, and the negation of this individuality in order to return back to communal existence. The first moment as the negation of the totality of *ningen* (人間) is, for Watsuji, a negation aimed at establishing ‘individuality,’ that is, self-awareness. However, this moment, by the time it reaches such awareness, is again negated and returns to the totality of *ningen* (人間) which is properly communal life. He explains that this double negation comes about precisely because the moment one arrives at self-realization, one at the same time realizes that one is already socially embedded and thus belongs to the totality of *ningen* (人間).

This double negation that starts from the negation of totality if only to return to it again is what Watsuji calls the movement of ‘absolute negation’ that leads to the derivation of the “true reality of an individual, as well as of totality” — “emptiness.”⁷⁸ Emptiness is the real feature of the totality of *ningen* (人間) inasmuch as it is a continuous movement from totality to individuality and then back to totality. Under this sense, the elements of this totality, that

⁷⁴ Watsuji writes: “The Japanese language ... possesses a very significant word, namely, *ningen* (人間). On the basis of the evolved meaning of this word, we Japanese have produced a distinctive conception of human being. According to it, *ningen* (人間) is the public and, at the same time, the individual human beings living within it.” Watsuji, *WTR*, 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

is, the individuals and the social whole, "subsist not in themselves, but only in the relationship of each with the other."⁷⁹ The individual's individuality is negated for the sake of the whole that is to be established, and the whole is that ground against which an individual rebels to establish itself.⁸⁰ Inasmuch as this is a continuous self-negation; therefore, this negative structure is what renders the continuous formation of human beings.⁸¹ If it is the case for Watsuji that ethics is the *study of ningen* (人間), and if *the absolute totality of ningen* (人間) *is absolute negativity*, then the basic principle of ethics for him is the realization of the absolute totality of *ningen* (人間)⁸² 'as' absolute emptiness.⁸³

In the process of uncovering this meaning of *ningen* (人間), Watsuji elucidates his critique of Heidegger and begins with the question of whether it is appropriate to immediately associate 'publicness' with the 'society' or the 'community.' In this, he stresses that the term 'public' is one of the central problems of modern philosophy and points to Heidegger's idea of the 'world.' He writes,

When Heidegger characterized human existence by means of the phrase *being in the world*, he made use of the concept of intentionality prevalent in phenomenology, as the jumping-off point. He carried this structure a step further, to transfer it to existence, and understood it as having to do with tools. Therefore, we can say that he set the pattern for explicating the subjective meaning of what is called the *world*. But in his philosophy, the relation between person and person lies hidden behind the relation between person and tools.⁸⁴

In this critique, Watsuji emphasizes that Heidegger overlooked the 'person to person relation' that composes the world and focused only on the individual human person in its relation with things as tools.⁸⁵ He goes on stressing that it was only Karl Löwith who uncovered the hidden anthropological dimension of Heidegger's idea of 'world' that deals with

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ This aspect of Heidegger's philosophy had not been elaborated in the preceding section for the fact that the writer is of the opinion that Heidegger's philosophy does not take as its central point this relation of human beings to things in terms of their presence and manipulability but is only an aspect of the task to disclose human's ways of being in the world.

mutual relations. This was when Löwith clarified that in Heidegger's philosophy: "a human being is a person 'together with others,' and the world is *mit-Welt* (with-World), that is, the public, whereas *being in the world* means 'to relate with others.'"⁸⁶ Watsuji continues that if this is the case, then this kind of anthropology that deals with relation between oneself and the other, as 'mutual relations' of persons instead of with 'individual' persons, is bound to become "the basis for the framing and understanding of ethical problems."⁸⁷ Because precisely for Watsuji:

... the essential feature of life consists in the fact that persons assume an attitude of behaving themselves in relation with one another, and this attitude includes within itself the basic behaviour of human beings, that is to say, their *ethos*.⁸⁸

In conceding this way, Watsuji asserts that since such *ethos* is an *ethos* of the human being, ethics as a study of the *ethos* of the human being becomes a study of human existence as embedded in a world with others.

It is in following this clarification of Löwith about the idea of the world that Watsuji links the Japanese term *seken* (世間), which means 'the public,' and the term *yononaka* (世の中), which means the world, to the German word *Welt*. He argues that, "*Welt* is not just the world of nature, but of community existence, namely, of a society in which persons are related to each other."⁸⁹ He emphasizes that the analysis of *in-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the-world) is not only about the relation between persons and tools but greatly, "an analysis of community life" itself.⁹⁰ *Welt* which originally meant 'a generation' and a 'group of people,' is to a large extent similar with the signification of the character *se* (世) in *seken* (世間) or *yo* (世) in *yononaka* (世の中) which connotes something that is both temporal and spatial—temporal in signifying 'a generation,' and spatial in signifying 'a society.'⁹¹ Moreover, in *seken* (世間), the characters *ken*⁹² or *aida* (間), which pictographically shows being 'in between' or betweenness, and *naka* (中) in *yononaka* (世の中) which shows being 'in' or *in-ness*, also highlight the anthropological nature of the world that is not only spatial but very importantly, deeply relational.

⁸⁶ Watsuji, *WTR*, 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁹² If one can notice, the character *ken* had been referred to earlier as *gen* in the term *ningen*. This is so because the Romanization and pronunciation of Japanese characters differ depending on how it is used in a compound term.

Combining the terms' spatio-temporal sense with their social dimension, therefore, denotes that for Watsuji, the world itself implies a world of someone characterized by what Watsuji refers to as "living and dynamic betweenness"⁹³ with one's fellow human beings in time and space.

As ethics then is concerned with *ningen's* (人間) embeddedness in a spatio-temporal-world-with-others, Watsuji goes on to explain a final term that is fundamental to the groundwork of his ethics—the Japanese term for existence—*sonzai* (存在). The compound term roughly means "the subjective self-subsistence" of the self (*son*, 存) "within some place" (*zai*, 在).⁹⁴ As has been presented, *ningen* (人間) implies the dual structure of man as being in between social existence and as an individual human being. For Watsuji, what is referred to as the place the subject must stay in is precisely the human relations which characterize the very being of the subject. If it is tenable to hold that *son* (存) is the self-sustenance of the self and *zai* (在) as remaining within human relations, he remarks that *sonzai* (存在) precisely means the "self-sustenance of the self as betweenness."⁹⁵ Under this signification, Watsuji interprets that because *sonzai* (存在) deals precisely with how *ningen* (人間) is to sustain itself in human relations, *sonzai* (存在) represents the very way of existence of *ningen* (人間).⁹⁶ Therefore, if *ningen* (人間) signifies a dual structure and if *sonzai* (人間) is a 'remaining' to this dual structure, ethics as a study of *ningen* (人間) is aimed at safeguarding the possibility of *ningen sonzai* (人間存在, human existence), which means the human being remaining within the state of betweenness.

Having outlined the meaning of the four terms that consist the very core of Watsuji's discussions on ethics namely: *rinri* (倫理, ethics), *ningen* (人間, human being), *seken* (世間, public) or *yonononaka* (世の中, world), and *sonzai* (存在, existence), one can now proceed to ask—What characterizes ethics for Watsuji? To this question, he singles out four features which basically comprise his method: (1) Ethics is a study of *ningen* (人間) asking about *ningen* (人間); (2) Ethics is the study of *ningen* (人間) conceived as the practical interconnection of acts; (3) Ethics is a science that must translate practice into a definite proposition, "... is ..."; and (4) Ethics can only grasp subjective reality if it proceeds through the study of the practical and concrete expressions of *ningen sonzai* (人間存在).

The first characteristic of ethics that Watsuji mentions appears to be in close affinity to Heidegger's delimitation of the question of ontology, could be said to project a very distinct resemblance. What Watsuji emphasizes when he redoubles *ningen* (人間) in his statement "ethics is a study of *ningen* (人間)

⁹³ Watsuji, *WTR*, 18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

asking about *ningen* (人間)⁹⁷ is similar to the Heideggerian *Dasein* that asks about its own being as it asks about Being. Ethics, as the study of the human being, is at once a study of this human being *asking about* its existence; ethics asks about the “fundamental structure of the *sonzai* (存在) of *ningen* (人間).”⁹⁸ He follows the Heideggerian statement that “inquiry is a cognizant seeking for an entity both with regard to the fact that it is and with regard to its being as it is”⁹⁹ and reiterates: “first of all, learning in general, that is, to ‘ask’ already belongs to the *sonzai* (存在) of *ningen* (人間).”¹⁰⁰ Watsuji further writes: “Questioning belongs to the *sonzai* (存在) of *ningen* (人間), to the way of being of *ningen* (人間);”¹⁰¹ and concludes: “the primary characteristic of the method of ethics consists in the point that the asking activity and what is asked are one.”¹⁰²

The second characteristic of ethics that Watsuji points out is “ethics as the study of *ningen* (人間) conceived as the practical interconnection of acts.”¹⁰³ In this feature of ethics, Watsuji brings to the fore again the dual structure of *ningen* (人間) inasmuch as he describes it as not only an ‘individual subject’ but at the same time, and very importantly, a ‘practical interconnection of acts.’¹⁰⁴ He says that “the *sonzai* (存在) of *ningen* (人間) is from the beginning to end a practical acting subject, as well as subjective interconnections.”¹⁰⁵ This means that ethics inquires about subjectivity but highlights that this subjectivity is subjectivity as betweenness. In this sense, Watsuji emphasizes that in the study of *ningen* (人間), we are not dealing simply with singular subjectivity, but rather a subjectivity made possible only insofar as it has been a product of the interplay of an entire network of relational everyday activity within a given social community.

The third feature of ethics for Watsuji that determines the method of ethics is the fact that “ethics is a science that must translate practice into a definite proposition, ‘... is ...’”¹⁰⁶ What Watsuji meant by this is that “ethics is not a science that deals only with the objective meaning-content of noematic objects” rather, “it is a science that deals with human reality.”¹⁰⁷ However, since human practical life is ‘not yet’ a science, ethics must transform it into one. This is where Watsuji’s Western influence makes a distinct presence. His

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Heidegger, *BT*, 24/5.

¹⁰⁰ Watsuji, *WTR*, 29.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

claim is that ethics can only be a science “by transforming human reality into *logos*.”¹⁰⁸ It must, he says, “translate practice into a definite proposition.”¹⁰⁹ However, he tempers this direct theorization of ethics by asserting that even if it is a *logos* or proposition, it must not be forgotten that these are still “subjective realities” and “cannot really be absolutely objectified.”¹¹⁰ This way, Watsuji affirms ethics (*rinrigaku*) as a science (*gaku*), but only a science whose ‘absolute objectivity’ cannot be guaranteed by virtue of the fact that the study is a study of ‘dynamic’ practical existence.

The last feature of ethics that Watsuji singles out is that “ethics can only grasp subjective reality if it proceeds through the study of the practical and concrete expressions of *ningen sonzai* (人間存在).”¹¹¹ In following the third characteristic as a science of the practical acts of *ningen* (人間), Watsuji stresses out that such practical acts can only be derived from the “expressions of *sonzai* (存在) already carried out within the realm of practice.”¹¹² What mediates the *sonzai* (存在) of *ningen* (人間) as subjective reality and its scientific understanding are precisely these ‘expressions’ that are “expressions of betweenness.”¹¹³ Watsuji, here, highlights the fact that these expressions are the “things of daily life,” the “everyday experience of human beings,” and as such constitute within themselves a certain sense of understanding, or logic, or order, that makes it capable for a science to grasp subjective reality.¹¹⁴

Using these four characteristics that determine ethics, Watsuji sums up how ethics must be viewed and understood. He writes,

As an inquiry to *ningen* (人間), ethics turns back to the person inquiring (first). Hence, it must subjectively grasp the subjective *ningen* (人間)(second). What is more, the object of science is exclusively concerned with meaning connections (third). Hence, the subjective grasp must use as its medium “the expressions of *ningen’s* (人間) *sonzai* (存在),” which expressions are like a melting furnace through which subjective *ningen* (人間) is transformed into its meaning connections (fourth).¹¹⁵

These four perspectives are for Watsuji what constitute *rinrigaku*. It is an inquiry of the human being about itself which leads to the realization of

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

its being as 'subjective community.' Watsuji's idea of *rinrigaku* does not 'draw' judgments about human existence, but instead, 'goes back' to the very expressions of subjective-communal life within which we always already live in, and recognize how they express how we come to have any practical understanding at all. In ethics, insofar as Watsuji is concerned, one is not concerned in 'creating' a science of how we ought to relate within a society, but in understanding how we 'already' relate and how we are to remain in such relatedness. An ethical act is an act that is grounded in and triggered by one's historicity, not a principle that is yet to be realized.

The Heidegger-Watsuji Tension

What can now be singled out from this presentation of the two philosophers' views on ontology and ethics? Here, it has been laid out that for Heidegger, ontology insofar as it deals with the question of Being, necessarily embarks on the question of the being of *Dasein*. In the same manner, for Watsuji, inasmuch as ethics is the study of the laws of social existence, it is hence a study of *ningen* (人間) within relational existence. What this signifies to us is that intimately, both ontology and ethics take as their foundational standpoint, the standpoint of the human being. This human being is not like the traditional *subject* in Western philosophy which both Heidegger and Watsuji were critical about, but instead a human being that is living in a 'world' within which he encounters and relates with other beings who share and express the same way of being as his.

The objects of ontology and ethics are Being and social existence, respectively, and yet both embark on the point of elucidating first and foremost the existence of *Dasein* and *Ningen* (人間). Towards the disclosure of the basic existential structures of *Dasein* and *Ningen* (人間), it can be recognized that Heidegger and Watsuji also share the recognition of our primary embeddedness in a world and at that, the social existence which constitutes us. The basic concepts of the human being, existence, the world, and our being with others comprise a big chunk of their philosophies that one is led to think that there is really no gap between their thoughts.

However, obvious as these similarities might be, it is to be noted that the similar contention Heidegger and Watsuji share in this exposition of the human individual seems to differ when Watsuji argues against Heidegger when dealing with the concept of authenticity.

Watsuji interprets that if for Heidegger, death is the source of authenticity insofar as it individualizes *Dasein* from the *they-self*, for him, such authenticity is incomplete. His claim is that, "What Heidegger calls

authenticity is, in reality, inauthenticity."¹¹⁶ He further adds that authenticity is only realized when the 'self,' that is arrived at in this individuation becomes annihilated, that is, when "inauthenticity becomes further negated through the non-dual relation of self and other."¹¹⁷ Authenticity for Watsuji requires not only breaking past the *they*-self through realizing oneself as a being-towards-death, but in taking further another negation which basically leads the self back to the totality from which it has been negated. In this sense, Watsuji writes, "the finitude in question is no longer a finitude appearing in 'being in its death' but is rather a finitude of an individual that stands in relation to others."¹¹⁸ The totality of a human being is not the individual as bounded by death, but the self-emptying individual that stands essentially related to others. Totality lies not in individuality but rather in communality. Thus Watsuji asks: "If one is concerned with only individual being, then how significant can this preparedness for death be?"¹¹⁹ The self-realization of the finitude of an individual being is of no significance by itself, for it only receives significance in its relation to others. Rather than affirming your individuality, death should affirm your belongingness to a community wherein your death has significance and makes sense. In one sense, it can be said that this expresses the Japanese tendency to regard death as something that is not to be feared but is even the source of honor. In dying for one's community, one does not become a completed 'individual' but becomes a 'member' of such community.

Although Watsuji's critique of Heidegger seems convincing, Watsuji seems to have missed a key element in Heidegger's elucidation of authenticity. Heidegger, when referring to the individuating power of death, precisely indicated that death "individuates only in such a manner that, as the possibility which is not to be outstripped, it makes *Dasein*, as being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-being of others"¹²⁰ For Heidegger, in death, one does not only realize one's individuated self but also the fundamental truth that such authentic self is grounded in one's being-with-others—the totality of *Dasein* lies in these two interdependent aspects of its being. As he asserts: "It is only when people are resolute that they can authentically be with one another."¹²¹ It seems that when Watsuji singles out how Heidegger's conception of authenticity is incomplete, he is interpreting the phenomenon of death as the physical curtailment of one's life. For Heidegger, death is not simply the end of one's life. In death, life—as a life in

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Heidegger, *BT*, 309/264.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 344/298.

the world, as a life with things, as a life with others, as a life that is not an infinite expansion—is at the very core affirmed. When Heidegger talks about death, he is not concerned about a biological fact; he is referring instead to an ‘ontological disposition.’ *Dasein* relates to death as a ‘possibility’ that, once fully affirmed, could radically change how *Dasein* understands and relates to his present that will consequently reorient *Dasein*’s future choices and interpretation of the past. It is in this line of thinking that Heidegger could be interpreted to propose an identity-based ethics grounded in the affirmation of one’s temporal existence. Death for Heidegger is the seal that the meaning of *Dasein*’s being is temporality and that all of *Dasein*’s understanding of Being is derived from temporality. In this way, Heidegger does not say that because *Dasein* is individuated he is already authentic because the social existence from which it first belongs makes it inauthentic, and then proceeds on to live a life at a distance from everyone else. Rather, in being individuated, *Dasein* at the same time realizes that it is, in its everyday living, a being-with-others. *Dasein*’s authenticity does not lie on its being individuated and no more, but in the fact that wholly, *Dasein* “realizes” his basic existential structure as an individual ‘with’ others. As he says, “A lively mutual acquaintanceship on the basis of being-with often depends upon how far one’s own *Dasein* has understood itself at the time; but this means that it depends only upon how far one’s essential being with others has made itself transparent and has not disguised itself.”¹²² It is only in the acknowledgment of *Dasein*’s groundedness to its historicity and temporal existence that authenticity, rather than an extraction from inauthentic communal life, is actually an affirmation of it as an ontological condition from which it will never be able to extract itself. Inauthenticity is actually the very condition of *Dasein*’s possibilities. So that it is not at all a question of authentic *or* inauthentic existence, but rather, authenticity ‘within’ inauthenticity.

Epilogue: Ethics and Ontology

Given such proximity and divergence in Heidegger and Watsuji’s philosophies, what has remained now is the question of the relation of ethics and ontology. Seen from how Watsuji divulged the different aspects of ethics, one can say that ethics is a question of values that are at the very core socially embedded. How Watsuji battled with what he claims as the individualistic tendencies of Heidegger’s thinking is very much reflected in how he argued for the understanding of social reality as a tension between the values of individualism and communality. If for him, Heidegger still has traces of individualism, ethics must in its core strive to balance that with one’s

¹²² *Ibid.*, 160/125.

authentic social belongingness. In his perspective, ontology and ethics are fused because what is studied in ontology is the existence of the human individual-in-a-world-with-others, and by that very sense, it is already a study of the *ethos* of the individual that is at the same time social. It is also a study not only of *is* but also of *ought* because insofar as the meaning of 'existence' for him is 'to remain,' 'to self-sustain' within human relations, this must be the sustenance in a balanced way of one's dual nature as a self and as someone belonging to a community. Given that this dual nature can be easily overpowered by the domination of one of its elements over the other, ethics and human existence as such are an infinite battle to keep the elements in equilibrium. But apart from this, it has to be emphasized that the two, one's individual and communal existence, are not separated but are inter- or co-dependent.

Meanwhile, if ethics is a tracing to the very end the practical consequences of a conception of the structure of the human being's existence, in Heidegger's case, ontology does not push it that far. It only describes the basic structure of how values or practices emerge or are disclosed in the first place. To uncover the ethical dimension of existence is for him not the task of ontology. Its elucidation of human existence is only a preliminary task in answering the main questions of ontology, namely, "What is the meaning of Being?" Heidegger writes,

... the analytic of *Dasein* remains wholly oriented towards the guiding task of working out the question of Being ... If our purpose is to make such an anthropology possible, or to lay its ontological foundations, our Interpretation will provide only some of the 'pieces,' even though they are by no means inessential ones. Our analysis of *Dasein*, however, is not only incomplete; it is also, in the first instance *provisional*. It merely brings out the being of this entity, without Interpreting its meaning. It is rather a preparatory procedure by which the horizon for the most primordial way of interpreting Being may be laid bare.¹²³

If ontology uncovers in the process the being of *Dasein*, it may touch upon ethics but that is not ontology's goal. Ethics is a different field which ontology cannot fail to intersect with insofar as both studies take the human being as their departure point. This is the reason why Levinas, for instance, criticizes Heidegger. Levinas thinks that Heidegger's Being flattens out the

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 38/17.

dimensionality and dynamicity of Others.¹²⁴ Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*:

To affirm the principle of *Being*, over the *existent*, is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone* who is an existent (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being* of the *existent*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of the existent (a relationship of knowing) and subordinates justice to freedom.¹²⁵

However, this is not the point of Heidegger; ontology is not about *Dasein*'s particular 'relation' with others, but rather the 'structure' of its being that describes how come it is in the first place related to others, or that it can only understand itself in relation to others. It is not to make relationality subordinate to the structure or to impersonalize it for the sake of 'domination,' but only to proximally make sense what makes ethics possible in the first place. And although it tries to understand the structure of our relations or how we are related to others, it does not however determine how we 'ought to relate'. This latter requirement is now the subject matter of ethics not ontology. But since there are a lot of nuances and intricacies in this philosophical debate between Heidegger and Levinas, and this paper is one that is focused on Watsuji and Heidegger, the elucidation of this theme shall be allotted for another research.¹²⁶

Overall, the sense this entire elucidation aims at is the reassertion of the divergent objectives of ontology and ethics despite them having almost similar preliminary content as presented in the case of Heidegger and Watsuji. One of them describes human existence because only in doing so can one understand that very thing which this human is concerned about: Being, (ontology); while the other one is concerned in describing human existence because in doing so, one sees that it is once and for all a social being and in being such, this individual's most important concern is how to remain in such relational existence in order to be a true *ningen* (人間), that is at once social *and* individual (ethics). Ontology is a description of the situation of the human within a society. Ethics is the study of how humans can remain and live in harmony within that social world.

¹²⁴ See also Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge Classics, 2001).

¹²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 45; as cited in Steven Gans, "Ethics or Ontology: Levinas and Heidegger," in *Philosophy Today*, 16:2 (1972), 117.

¹²⁶ See Gans, "Ethics or Ontology: Levinas or Heidegger," 117-121.

Having this as food for thought, can it really be said that apart from the distinction of Heidegger and Watsuji on the category which they use in summarizing their philosophical projects, their thoughts are actually disjunct? I claim that they express close proximity. From this backdrop one can also realize a possible insight about comparative engagement as an approach to philosophy. Inasmuch as the difference between Heidegger and Watsuji's labelling of ontology and ethics is something that cannot be easily reconciled for it requires another rigorous presentation of the signification of ethics and ontology, this kind of difference can actually be said to offer a very challenging feat to comparative philosophy. When comparative philosophy is able to highlight the impasse of formalizations such as this, the distance between ideas, and where incommensurability becomes a true incommensurability, it is at the same time opening the possibility for the expansion of philosophy and a brave attempt to figure out what might be considered as universal. Comparative philosophy in highlighting discontinuities in thought, at the same time highlights the ruptures, the cracks in our cogitations and hence the opening for a new project for thinking. For it is when we see where things do not follow, where exceptions exist, that thought is once again summoned to choose, decide, and make a stand.

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