**The Genuine Possibility of Being-with:**

**Watsuji, Heidegger, and the Primacy of Betweenness**

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**Abstract**

In *Rinrigaku*, Watsuji Tetsurō criticizes Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* for taking as its starting point the standpoint of the individual “I.” For Watsuji, this “I” is an abstraction, and starting from it leads the phenomenologist to neglect the more fundamental standpoint of the person who is deeply engaged in social activities. In this paper, I explain that Watsuji’s criticism is helpful in shedding light on Heidegger’s failure to connect hermeneutic phenomenology to ethics in *Being and Time*. In particular, it is helpful in understanding the shortcomings of Heidegger’s account of authenticity, which in *Being and Time* is juxtaposed with Dasein’s immersion in social relations. I go on to argue, however, that Heidegger had made a more significant connection between hermeneutic phenomenology and ethics earlier, in his 1924 Marburg lectures on Aristotle (*Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*), where his treatment of being-with-one-another resonates with Watsuji’s later account of betweennness (*aidagara*).

**Keywords:**

Watsuji, Heidegger, ethics, authenticity, hermeneutics, community

The late American writer, Walker Percy, observed that human beings today harbor a conflicted self-understanding. “Man knows he is something more than an organism in an environment. . . ” Percy writes, “yet he no longer has the means of understanding the traditional Judeo-Christian teaching that the ‘something more’ is a soul somehow locked in the organism like a ghost in a machine. What is he then? He has not the faintest idea” (1975, 9). Percy’s observation remains provocative for us today, because the conflict that he points to is still a live one. This is clear when we consider contemporary habits of thinking about the role of social life in human existence. After all, it is common for us today to point out that our perceptions, our patterns of thought, and even our value systems are shaped by the concrete social relations in which we are imbedded. Meanwhile, it remains unclear how being imbedded within social relations provides us with any ethical directive; and more often than not, we end up relying upon a conception of the individual as a source of action that is independent of social forces in order to ground ethical claims. In light of this confusion, then, we might ask: Is there any way that social relationships are truly fundamental to our being-in-the-world? And are they fundamental in a way that would bear at all upon the ethical horizon of life—shedding light on how we should live and, in particular, how we should live with one another?

In this essay, I will explain how Watsuji Tetsurō takes up these questions in his magnum opus, *Rinrigaku*, in large part as a challenge to Martin Heidegger’s limited account of social existence in *Being and Time*. Like *Being and Time*, Watsuji’s *Rinrigaku* is a project of hermeneutic ontology. It seeks to understand what worldhood must be in order to sustain the phenomena that are given to human understanding. Unlike Heidegger in *Being and Time*, however, Watsuji insists on an essential link between worldhood and forms of what he calls betweenness (*aidagara*), that is, the various ways in which we bear ourselves toward one another that give rise to mutual understanding. For Watsuji, this essential dimension to worldhood is largely overlooked in Heidegger’s famous work. Watsuji’s account therefore reveals important shortcomings in the way that the human being’s social existence is taken up in *Being and Time*. However, as I will argue here, Heidegger comes very close to thinking something like the concept of betweenness earlier in his career, namely, during his 1924 Marburg lectures on Aristotle. Toward the end of my essay, then, I trace out the Watsujian dimensions of Heidegger’s early explorations of Aristotle’s philosophy in order to shed light on the important considerations of Dasein’s sociality that drop out in Heidegger’s later, most famous work.

**Watsuji’s criticism of Heidegger and the recovery of betweenness**

Throughout much of the Western philosophical tradition, there has been a tendency to conceive of understanding as something that is generated by the individual's interaction with an external world. Each mind, in this view, processes experience in a unique way. For Watsuji, however, this commonly accepted account fails to appreciate the role that social institutions and their histories play in the development of our understanding, and the extent to which understanding arises in common for us. The heat that I feel on a hot summer day, for example, does not come to me as private sense data, independent of any social meaning. I feel the heat, Watsuji insists, as something felt in common with others; I know it to be the same heat about which my neighbors also complain (Watsuji 1996, 259).[[1]](#footnote-1) However, this mutual understanding that, for the most part, I take for granted is not primarily the result of conversation. For Watsuji, betweenness becomes materialized gradually through the forms of spatiality and embodied social ritual wherein we become accustomed to regularly encountering one other. To illustrate this point, Watsuji invites us to consider how we habitually bear ourselves toward others even in times of solitude. When a philosopher withdraws into a private room to write, for example, her writing bears the mark of others with whom she is in virtual relation. Watsuji explains:

Is one justified in holding that the operation of writing has developed without anticipating its readers? To write that “only I am self-evident” is itself contradictory. For writing is an expression of words, and words are what have come to shape themselves in anticipation of partners who live and talk together. . . . In light of this, we can say that for us to read books or to write sentences we are already involved with other persons. (1996, 50)

Here we see how Watsuji challenges Descartes’s argument that thinking confirms the existence of a separate, individual thinking thing, insisting on the contrary that our thinking is always for another, often a virtual other as the above example shows. In this way, Watsuji’s *Rinrigaku* elaborates on the fundamental role played by forms of betweenness in our basic understanding of things, highlighting betweenness as an essential component of any hermeneutic ontology (Yuasa 1990, 170).

Heidegger’s *Being and Time* had a strong influence on Watsuji. For Watsuji, though, Heidegger’s work falls short of appreciating the depth of our being-with-one-another by taking as its starting point the intentional consciousness of “I,” that is, the standpoint of an isolated individual. Although Heidegger insists that Dasein is more fundamental than the opposition between subject and object, Watsuji finds this attachment to the “I” evident in different features of Heidegger’s Dasein analysis.

Above all, Watsuji finds the standpoint of the isolated individual to be implied in Heidegger’s analysis of tool-being. This analysis is a pivotal part of Heidegger’s ontology in *Being and Time*. It is, after all, in a particular mode of concern that a world is first set up and things first appear to us, namely, the mode of concern that encounters beings as equipmental, as tools for some definite end. Heidegger writes in Section 15, “The kind of dealing which is closest to us is . . . not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use” (1962, 95). Thus, it is “only by the circumspection with which one takes account of things in farming,” for example, that the south wind is discovered “in its being” (112). This point, that things appear to us always through a mode of concern, informs Wastuji’s own hermeneutic ontology. Watsuji sees Heidegger’s analysis falling short, however, in the way that it obscures the primacy of human relations in setting-forth the world. For while Heidegger suggests that it is only through the medium of tools that others are manifest, he fails to see that tools only first emerge through human relationships. As Watsuji puts it:

Only in the concern with other persons do we find tools. It is not that a shoemaker finds other persons only through the medium of the shoes he produces but that he makes shoes as ordered by other persons. It is not that the scholar finds others scholars only through the medium of his desk or his books but that in thinking through his problems . . . in terms of those human relationships collectively called the academic world, he comes to need books. Heidegger did not heed such self-evident matters of fact. (1996, 176)

Thus, Watsuji argues that, despite distancing himself from the Cartesian tradition in which the individual cogito is the basis for understanding, Heidegger’s ontology of Dasein nevertheless starts from the presupposition of an individual existence separate from social existence. Heidegger overlooks the fundamental role that the other plays in setting up the world of circumspection. Conceived of as an individual Dasein, then, Heideggerean Dasein is an abstraction, since the world that is most basic and familiar to us is the world that is configured through reciprocal social relations, relations of betweenness.

For Watsuji, Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s spatiality is further indication of the same problem. In Section 22 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempts to show how Dasein’s spatiality is established in the circumspection of concern: “We say that to go over yonder is ‘a good walk,’ ‘a stone’s throw,’ or ‘as long as it takes to smoke a pipe.’ These measures express not only that they are not intended to ‘measure’ anything but also that the remoteness here estimated belongs to some entity to which one goes with concernful circumspection” (1962, 140). While Watsuji follows Heidegger in reconceiving space apart from the space of abstract extension in which things are embedded, he argues that Heidegger still fails to see the way that spatiality is inherent in the practical interconnections of human beings. The phrases “a good walk” and “a stone’s throw” still seem to refer spatiality back to an individual who, by throwing or walking, sets forth a world. But for Watsuji things become spatialized through human relations. As Robert E. Carter explains: “When we walk alone, we walk on roads and paths carved by generations of others, and our purpose in walking is inevitably socially linked in some way with others” (1996, 335). Indeed, for Watsuji, systems of communication and transportation not only reflect existing social relations but also sustain them and grow them. Thus, the spaces we live in, spaces of embodied intimacy but also increasingly spaces we carve out through various communication technologies (from mass-print newspapers to telephone to video chatting) provide us with nearness to one another. These existential spaces are not superimposed upon the space carved out by my individual activity, just as they are not superimposed upon an abstract expanse of space. They emerge through our shared activities.

On the basis of this transformed conception of Dasein, Watsuji points to further shortcomings in Heidegger’s project, namely, in his understanding of authenticity. Because Heidegger failed to adequately account for how being-there is always being-with-one-another, Watsuji argues, he erroneously associates holding onto the self with authenticity and associates selflessness with inauthenticity, even though, as he points out, selflessness has played an essential role in every conception of morality since ancient times (Watsuji 1996, 225).[[2]](#footnote-2) For Watsuji, though, authenticity is obtained through the self-aware realization of the nonduality between the self and others. Self-realization here is important, as it points to the tension that Watsuji insists upon hearing in the phrase *ningen sonzai*, ordinarily translated as “human being.” Watsuji notes that *ningen* is composed of two characters: *nin*, meaning person, and *gen*, meaning space or between. *Sonzai* indicates a way of preserving something over time, of sustaining it. Thus, *ningen sonzai* is that which preserves human beings as human beings over time, that is, through ongoing circumstances in which there is the potential for the human’s existence to dissolve. With this phrase, we can hear how the bond that exists in a relationship of betweenness is not a simple, immediate unity but, as Erin McCarthy (2011) argues, a space where both the nonduality and the alterity of I and other is preserved.[[3]](#footnote-3) In this way, it is unlike the relationship among parts within an organism. In a relationship of betweenness, each part has the potential for separation. A hand cannot leave the body and go be something else. But people in a community can do this: a wife can leave her spouse, a pickpocket can betray the trust that is assumed in a crowded bus, a father can leave his children, a friend can betray the trust of their friend. The parts here have the potential to dissolve their bond to the group. So, an ethical community is, then, a delicate balance in which each part of the whole must have the potential to do something else. It is in negating these other possibilities, Watsuji insists, that an ethical community is achieved. He calls this the negation of the negation of nonduality (1996, 228). With this in mind, we can see that nothing prevents the call of conscience from being both an individuating call and a realization of betweenness, that is, a decentering of the ego.[[4]](#footnote-4) Contrariwise, Watsuji says that, in *Being and Time*, “conscience is concerned with only the preparedness for death and has nothing to do with *ningen sonzai*, which consists of the relationship between self and other” (1996, 226).

Having reviewed Watsuji’s criticisms, let us now consider the strength of the interpretation of *Being and Time* upon which these criticisms rest. After all, Heidegger explicitly addresses how the subject of his analysis, Dasein, differs from the individual “I” or the individual subject of experience typically studied by philosophers. Indeed, in Section 25, when Heidegger addresses the question of “who” Dasein is, he argues explicitly that Dasein is not the isolated “I,” that the account of Being-in the-world shows us that “a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ proximally, nor is it ever given” (1962, 152). Heidegger then goes on to elaborate on the “being-with” that characterizes Dasein’s everyday existence in the next section. Here we learn that in the work-world of the craftsman one encounters not only equipment for the work but others for whom the work is intended as well (1962, 153). In this way, Dasein has the character of Dasein-*with*. Its existence is *Mitdasein*.

This point in Section 26 about Dasein’s being-with-others is already anticipated in Heidegger’s earlier account of referential totality. While we are used to thinking about our primary experience of things as a subject’s encounter that pre-exists any special interest or concern, Heidegger challenges this description by showing how things are ready-to-hand for us insofar as they are disclosed by some project with which we are concerned. In Section 26, he elaborates on how others are encountered in the course of these projects as well: “When, for example, we walk along the edge of a field but ‘outside it,’ the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was bought at So-and-so’s shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth” (Heidegger 1962, 153-4). Thus, in the course of its everyday endeavors, Dasein encounters others—others who have the character of other Daseins.

Moreover, Dasein’s being with others also seems to be implied in Heidegger’s description of Dasein’s existential spatiality. Heidegger tells us that this spatiality is captured in phrases like “over there,” “right here,” “a day’s drive,” “a stone’s throw,” and so forth—phrases that, however imprecise, “have their own definiteness which is thoroughly intelligible” (1962, 140). Though Heidegger does not talk about other Daseins here, it is not hard to see that the spatiality closest to Dasein is set forth in language that is shared, indeed that is shared by virtue of living in common.

And yet Watsuji’s observations about *Being and Time* are not so easily set aside. *Rinrigaku* reads like a very different project after all—one in which being-with-others is the central object of examination in every section of the book. By contrast, in *Being and Time*, it is 150 pages before the topic is raised explicitly. This might be resolved by pointing out that it is not until Part IV that Heidegger turns to the topic of Dasein’s relationship with others, but the omission can still be said to cause problems for Heidegger’s descriptions of Dasein’s spatiality and, more acutely, for his account of authenticity. Let us first consider the problem with the account of spatiality. When Heidegger describes how Dasein encounters other Daseins (walking along the edge of a field, “the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person,” just as “the book we have used was bought at So-and-so’s shop”), one gets the impression that the existence of others is discovered as part of an individual project. What is described, after all, are the actions of an individual and, while it is certainly possible to interpret them as part of a social world, Heidegger offers no such analysis. In this way, Watsuji seems right when he argues that, for Heidegger, “the relation between person and person lies hidden behind the relation between person and tools” (Watsuji 1996, 17).

The truth is, however, that Heidegger’s position on Dasein’s spatiality seems ambiguous in *Being and Time*. Lawrence Hatab points to this very ambiguity when he explains that Heidegger’s treatment of Dasein’s practical dealings “leaves almost untouched the significant sphere of *social practice*, the ways in which human beings engage each other in interpersonal relations and the province of values,” while still recognizing that “productive activity presupposes and discloses a public, shareable, co-produced world” (Hatab 2000, 65). The recognition of a public, shared spatiality is also evident at one point in Heidegger’s discussion of the impact of new technologies like the radio on Dasein’s spatiality. “All the ways in which we speed things up, as we are more or less compelled to do today,” he writes, “push us on towards the conquest of remoteness” (Heidegger 1962, 140). This suggests that, despite other parts of the text that describe spatiality as emerging from an individual’s activity, Heidegger does at least at times recognize how cultural forms of life can, through their specific style of communication, have a massive impact on Dasein*’s* spatiality. Indeed, with the radio, Heidegger says, Dasein now de-distances the entire world.

Still, the community of other Daseins here with whom I share the world set forth by such technology hardly merits the name “community” in its fullest sense. I may share a form of life with other people, but there is nothing that indicates that this relationship would be one set to work through any kind of active being-for-another marked by love, trust, tenderness or even respect. These social relationships are not ethical or even interpersonal in character. [[5]](#footnote-5) They are, for the most part, hindrances to being authentic (McCarthy 2010, 22). Indeed, there are only two passing references to friendship in the *Being and Time* (1962, 153 and 232) and no mention at all of any particular familial relationship of any kind: siblings, spouses, children, parents, and so forth.

By contrast, about 45 pages of the book are dedicated to an elaboration of *inauthentic* being-with, suggesting that the discussion of *Mitdasein* in Section 26 serves primarily as preparation for the description of Dasein’s falling, that is, how it loses its awareness of itself and its possibilities in its everyday being-with others. Indeed, on this point, Heidegger’s attention to the primacy of social relations cannot be overstated. Heidegger, in fact, recognizes the “who” of everyday experience to be not an isolated subject but a collective, even non-differentiated one—*das Man*. For the most part, this is the way we are with-others, according to *Being and Time*. The paradigm of such a non-differentiated “we”—which Heidegger says pervades our everyday existence—is the brute levelling effect of public transportation and public journalism. While Watsuji sees such developments in social technology as integral to *aidagara*, Heidegger is deeply suspicious of them. For Heidegger:

In utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of the ‘Others,’ in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the ‘they’ is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they [man] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge. . . . The ‘they,’ which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness. (1962, 164)

*Das Man* is there alongside Dasein everywhere, but not as a friend, a sibling or even a good colleague is. No, *das Man* is “nothing definite” at all. *Das Man* is there with us when we insist that “one shouldn’t sit that way” or ask “How does one punctuate this sentence?” Here, of course, the “one” that we speak of is no other at all but in fact a closure of any encounter with new possibilities of any kind. Indeed, Heidegger says, that *das Man* “can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for anything. It ‘was’ always ‘they’ who did it, and yet it can be said that it has been ‘no one’” (1962, 165). Such a relationship to others, as Heidegger rightly observes, disburdens *Dasein* of its particularity and deprives it of its answerability. In this mode, others do not stand before me in their singularity but instead appear to me as abstract and predictable entities. As such, Heidegger goes on to argue, participation in “the they” paves the way for an inauthentic relationship to death—encapsulated by the expression “one dies.” One may die but this point about the abstract “they” is not a source of dread at all for the person who lives on in the virtual cloud of *das Man*.

But do all social relationships have this levelling effect, prompting Dasein to disburden itself of its particularity and answerability? Do the particular relationships in which we are widely and deeply imbedded as part of our being-in-the-world even tend to have this disburdening effect? Or do concrete relationships actually tend to occasion the opposite—calling one to their particularity and answerability? To be sure, I experience this levelling effect quite intensely when I find myself in certain conversations and with certain company—say, engaging in small talk in a room of university administrators or exchanging niceties with the person cutting my hair at the salon. Admittedly, such social interactions force me into idle talk. At the same time, such interactions feel strange to me precisely because this is not the way I usually relate to people. They are the exception that proves the rule. I don’t talk with a university administrator like I talk with my colleagues in the philosophy department when engaged in philosophical conversation. And I don’t talk with the man at the hair salon the way I would talk with my mother in a time of need.

In these latter cases, I do indeed encounter the particularity and answerability of my being—not as an anxiety before my own death but still as a call of conscience that individuates me and beckons me to hold myself free for the other. Here one needs what Silvia Benso calls tenderness, that attunement that is “burdened with the weight of its responsibility toward the things that it encounters” (2000, 174).[[6]](#footnote-6) As my previous examples show, such an attunement is—while certainly not just guaranteed by virtue of our belonging to a social organism—not uncommon. We may not have this attunement with everybody on the bus, but we have it with our friends—and even occasionally, when struck by our responsibility toward others, with strangers. Moreover, if anxiety—so often understood as what pulls us out of our absorption in social existence—is itself an ethical attunement that, as Hatab argues, “opens up the possibility of authentic appropriation, illumination, and modification of one’s social world,” pulling us instead out of “the kind of thoughtless complacency and comfort that keeps Dasein from seeing its ethical bearings more clearly as possibilities to be ascertained and chosen” (Hatab 2000, 78), then I need not negate my relations with others to be authentic. In fact, tending to the claim of others would then be pivotal to this undertaking. And if this is the case, is Watsuji not right that such relationships should make up a much bigger part of the analysis of Dasein?

**Being-with-one-another in the early Heidegger**

We have seen, up to this point, how Heidegger’s argument in *Being and Time* fails to take seriously the full significance of Dasein’s sociality, especially the role that it plays in Dasein’s potential for ethics. However, I would now like to argue that one finds a more serious reflection on different ways of relating to others in a lecture dedicated to the philosophy of Aristotle given in Marburg just two years before Heidegger completed *Being and Time*. There is no indication that Watsuji was familiar with the content of this lecture, *Die Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*. Heidegger’s approach to being-with-one-another (*Miteinandersein*) in the lecture, though, surely would have offered Watsuji a more detailed treatment of the sociality of Dasein.

In the lecture, Heidegger addresses several ideas in Aristotle’s practical philosophy regarding the primacy of social activities, and in particular of public discourse, for human existence. Some of the discussion sounds familiar for those who know the account of Dasein’s everyday relationship to language in Sections 34 and 35 of *Being and Time*. In the Marburg lecture, Heidegger describes discourse, that irreducibly social mode of understanding, as that possibility into which the Greeks are immediately ensnared. Thus, Heidegger tells us here that the popular Greek idea that the human is the ζῷονλόγον ἔχον (the animal that has language) means simply that: “The human being is the living thing that reads newspapers” (2009, 74). The projection of mass media backwards into antiquity here should strike us as anachronistic. However, we get a better sense of what Heidegger has in mind when he discusses the presence of sophistry in ancient Greek society. For Heidegger, like Plato, the sophists embodied a wayward sense of being the animal with language, the ζῷονλόγον ἔχον. The sophists talk persuasively to crowds without listening to any experts and while lacking knowledge of what they are talking about. They appeal to what seems right and true and distract from any deeper inquiry. In these ways, they exemplify what it means to inhabit a discourse inauthentically.

Taken in isolation, Heidegger’s descriptions of sophistry in the ancient world in the 1924 lecture could easily lead readers to see here another example of Heidegger disparaging discourse that is rooted in mutual understanding with others in a community. But Heidegger goes on to claim that Plato and Aristotle sought to develop a different, more fundamental relationship to λόγος and thus to *Miteinandersein*, one that was not just an immediateensnarement in speech (an ensnarement exploited by the sophists) but a way of letting things be heard.[[7]](#footnote-7) Leading up to this point, Heidegger had been addressing the distinction that Aristotle makes in Book I, Chapter 13 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* between the two components of the rational soul, where Aristotle recognizes that our rationality lies in part in our capacity to *listen* to λόγος,and not just in our capacity to think.[[8]](#footnote-8) And as we know from the account of unrestraint in Book VII, not all humans put to work this capacity to actively listen to λόγος.But in being able to let something be said, Heidegger says, the human is ζῷον λόγον ἔχον “in a new respect” (2009, 76). The human being emerges in this new respect not simply by possessing the faculty of speech but by developing a comportment of *listening*. Indeed, listening to one another appears to be an essential ingredient to ἦθος, if Heidegger is right to hear in this word “the ‘comportment’ of human beings, how the human being is there, how he offers himself as a human being, how he appears in being-with-one-another” (2009, 73). In this account, then, the distinct capacity of the human being is the ability to listen to the λόγος and, through this activity, to exist genuinely as being-with-one-another. By contrast, the one who is ensnared in discourse displays a capacity for the rational act of thought but not ἦθος in this way.

Strikingly, Heidegger offers the orator as an example of this kind of ἦθος, suggesting that such character can be found “in the way that the orator speaks” and “stands with respect to the matters about which he speaks” (2009, 73). Whereas the sophists contribute to the levelling of Dasein’s possibilities through the misological tendencies that are dramatized in Plato’s *Gorgias*, Heidegger’s point here is that there are other forms of discourse rooted in the social world, for example, forms of oratory, that require genuine listening to λόγος. They require, in other words, not just that one belong to a social body, but that one is, moreover, attentive toward those others with whom one shares a world.

Unfortunately, although Heidegger’s Marburg lectures provided the basis for *Being and Time*, none of these provocative interpretations of Aristotle’s practical philosophy would make it into the 1927 text which would end up defining Heideggerean philosophy in Japan and for Watsuji. This is unfortunate, since, had Watsuji been familiar with this lecture, it seems he would have found that it resonated with his own project in several ways.[[9]](#footnote-9) First, as a reader of Aristotle, Heidegger seems to give more attention to the very thing that Watsuji later highlights as fundamental for his hermeneutic ontology, namely, the being-with-one-another character of Dasein, which at this point he does not equate with inauthenticity. Second, like Watsuji himself, Heidegger makes clear in the early lecture how the essence of the human as being-with-one-another cannot be properly understood as its immediate condition but must be understood instead as *its own work*. As William McNeill argues, although the 1924 lecture does not specify the details of an authentic being-with-one-another, it does begin to sketch out what it means to be “attentive to the particular circumstances of action, relating to the beings disclosed therein, from out of an openness of and toward the phenomenon of the world as such . . .” (2006, 83). This insight resounds with Watsuji’s observation that the individual within an ethical community does not relate to this community in the way that a part is related to an organism. Rather, it knows it has the potential to negate the social bond and thus feels itself responsible for its actions. Understood this way, the social bond then becomes its own work—the negation of its power of negation. Thus, just as Watsuji’s project ultimately aims at an ethics, showing how goodness lies not simply in the immediate inheritance of social bonds, but in the way one actively bears oneself toward others, Heidegger also seems to discover in his reading of Aristotle the ethical import of how one bears oneself toward one’s community. Indeed, both Watsuji and Heidegger, then, seem to take to heart Aristotle’s point in the *Nicomachean Ethics* about who it is that we praise and for what (Aristotle 2002, 13, 1099a): just as it isn’t the strongest that we praise at the Olympic games, but the one who performs best in the competition, it isn’t the one who is simply imbedded in a society that we praise but the one who bears themselves well toward these relations. In this view, then, it is in allowing oneself to be claimed by others in this way and in being answerable for their existence that one takes on one’s authentic possibility.

In sum, while Watsuji’s criticism of Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s spatiality may miss the mark, the distinction he makes between the genuine possibility of being-with-others and *das Man*, the they-self, remains crucial. While developed more extensively in the 1924 lecture on Aristotle, the idea of listening to the other as a practice of genuine ethics seems largely abandoned by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. After all, in *Being and Time*, it is not the voice of the friend, or even the stranger on the bus, that calls to us as the call of conscience. On the contrary, Heidegger tells us, “If the caller, is asked about its name, status, origin, or repute, it not only refuses to answer, but does not even leave the slightest possibility of one’s making it into something with which one can be familiar when one’s understanding of Dasein has a ‘worldly’ orientation” (1962, 319). The call of conscience, then, does not come from other people with whom we engage in everyday social practices, nor from the orator who Heidegger had earlier described as an important site of *Mitdasein*. Still, we hear a remnant of Heidegger’s earlier exploration in a passing reference to friendship in *Being and Time* made in the context of a reflection on hearing, which Heidegger tells us “constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries around with it” (1962, 206). I have argued here, with Watsuji, that such a voice is irreducible to the voice of the “they” and to a kind of being-with-one-another as mutual absorption in average intelligibility, one that disburdens Dasein of its particularity (1962, 165). Rather, such a voice makes us answerable—it requires not only our resoluteness in being responsive to such claims but also an ongoing comportment of trust that is so fundamental to how the world appears to us, such that it cannot be said to be the willful act of individual subjects. From the standpoint of a Watsujian hermeneutic ontology, then, fleeing from ourselves would mean growing deaf to such particularizing and indeed to the personal demands that others make upon us, pushing these demands back into the anonymous cloud of the “the they.” To bear ourselves better toward these demands—whatever that should turn out to require—would, in turn, be the ongoing task of ethics.

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1. Watsuji had already begun developing this point about how human beings feel climactic conditions like heat in common with one another in his *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study* (1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For an excellent discussion of how the problem with Heidegger’s concept of authenticity and the problem with his account of spatiality stem from the same root, see McCarthy 2010, 20-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In emphasizing that Watsuji’s concept of *ningen sonzai* is not a static unity devoid of alterity, McCarthy (2011, 212-228) argues that such an idea is indeed important to ethics as it speaks of a communion whereby one’s individual agency is influenced and informed by the other but not completely dissolved in the union. She cites the Zen Buddhist saying, “Not one, not two,” as an articulation of this dynamic tension at the heart of ethics. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As James M. Shields (2009) explains, for Watsuji, independent consciousness is not something to be disdained or avoided. Rather, it is a necessary moment in the development of true commonality, for identifying with others in “a non-dualistic but also non-monistic meeting of self and other” (Shields 2009, 271). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As John Maraldo puts it in his discussion of Watsuji’s criticism of Heidegger: “… Our commonness or communal nature finds a predominantly negative interpretation in Heidegger; it is the inauthentic, anonymous ‘anyone’ into which we unique individuals tend to fall” (2002, 79). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In *The Face of Things*, Benso argues that the description of a genuine attunement toward things in Heidegger’s later work bears significant resemblance to Levinas’s account of the proper ethical attunement toward the Other. At one point, she describes this attunement that is at play in both cases as *tenderness*: “Always amid the things to which it tends, tenderness is inter-ested in the preservation of their specific kind of being, which expresses itself in the continuous differal and interplay of the Fourfold. Ignorant of any form of universality, except as an abstraction, tenderness is burdened with the weight of its responsibility toward the things that it encounters. . .” (Benso 2000, 174). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Heidegger refers to Plato and Aristotle in this context; however, it is already Socrates who highlighted this difference and made clear its importance for the vocation of philosophy. In Plato’s *Theaetetus*, for example, Socrates implores Theodorus not to regard him as a “bag of arguments” (161a), ready to pull out a refutation whenever it would be pleasing to an audience, and later in the same dialogue he contrasts the philosopher with those skilled at speaking in court, a comparison he also highlights during his own trial as recalled in Plato’s *Apology*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “So it appears that the irrational part of the soul is twofold, since the vegetative part of it has no share at all in reason, while the desiring and generally appetitive part does share in it in some way, insofar as it listens to and can obey reason. In the same way too we call listening to one’s father or friends ‘being rational,’ though not of course in the way that the mathematicians mean it. And that the irrational part is in some way persuaded by reason, is indicated by admonition and by every sort of chastisement and encouragement. But if one ought to say that this part of the soul has reason, then having reason will also be twofold, namely having it in the governing sense and in itself, or in the sense of something that can listen to a father. And virtue as well is divided in accordance with the same distinction, for we speak of virtues as pertaining either to thinking or to character . . . ” (Aristotle 2002, 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Watsuji may have been aware of the existence of the lecture and some of the ideas presented in it through Karl Löwith. After attending the lecture, Löwith went on to complete a *Habilitationsschrift* in 1928 on the subject of *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* under the guidance of Heidegger. Löwith held a position at Tohoku University from 1937-1941, while Watsuji was writing *Rinrigaku* from 1937-1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)