

APPLIED ETHICS

Theories, Methods and Cases

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Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy

Hokkaido University



Applied Ethics

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Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy
Hokkaido University
Sapporo, Japan

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Introduction

This collection of essays is the final summation of the Sixth International Conference on Applied Ethics held at Hokkaido University on October 26-28, 2011. The conference was organised by the Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy, Graduate School of Letters, Hokkaido University (Sapporo, Japan).

The purpose of this collection is to bring together the wide-ranging papers on various fields of applied ethics presented at the conference.

It is our hope that this collection will contribute to further developments in research on applied ethics and promote our Center’s mission, which is ‘to bridge the gap between theory and practice’.

August 2012

Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy
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Community of No-Self: The Ethical-Existential Structure of Community in Watsuji Tetsurō and Jean-Luc Nancy

Anton Luis SEVILLA

This paper was triggered by a series of questions posed at the 41st International Research Symposium on “Modernity and Buddhism” at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), chaired by Prof. Sueki Fumihiko in October 2011. Amidst discussions on the role Buddhism played in nationalist discourses in Japan and Sri Lanka, Japanese colonial activity, and in legitimizing wartime efforts, Prof. Brian Victoria (author of, among others, the controversial *Zen at War*) asked: “Can Buddhism overcome nationalism? Should Buddhism overcome nationalism? If so, how?”

This is a complex series of questions whose scope expands beyond the boundaries of Buddhist studies alone. They raise the problem of the fundamental relationship between private disciplines of subjectivity (religion, spirituality, existentialism, psychoanalysis, even postmodern philosophy) and socio-political ethics. Do private disciplines have definite socio-ethical demands? Conversely, do political ethics have distinct ramifications for the structure of individual subjectivity?

While this question is of tremendous importance, I cannot hope to answer it here. Both Buddhism and nationalism have many forms and definitions, and the relationship between the two is subject to many historical and cultural forces that I cannot discuss here. What I do hope to do is to make a *suggestion* as to *one* factor that seems to be under-discussed in relation to this problem. This factor is the fundamental relationship between subjectivity and the structure of community.

I wish to consider this fundamental relationship from a broader angle of philosophical ethics by asking: In what way does the dislocation of subjectivity affect the structure of communities formed by such subjects? While this does not satisfactorily answer the problem of the relationship between Buddhism and nationalism, perhaps it will provide a hint on the relationship between the “emptying of self” and the formation of communities (like a *Volk* or a nation-state).

In this paper, I will take up two thinkers who tried to address the question of the existential structure of ethical community: Watsuji Tetsurō and Jean-Luc Nancy. In the first section, after briefly introducing the two thinkers, I will examine their views on the basic structure of the individual and community and how it leads to a sense of ethics. In the second section, I will delve into the essential differences of Watsuji and Nancy, beginning with their differing responses to Heidegger’s notion

of being-toward-death. I will then proceed to a critical re-reading of Watsuji’s ethics possible from Nancy’s thought. Having done so, I hope to further elucidate this prolegomenon to a response to Prof. Victoria’s pressing question.

1. Community, Individuals, and Ethics

1.1 On the Two Thinkers

Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889-1960) is known as Japan’s premier ethical theorist and historian of ethical thought. He is also highly regarded for his phenomenological studies of art, culture and religion. He was deeply influenced by Western thought (Hegel, Heidegger, Dilthey, and Kant), but toward the middle of his career, he shifted his focus to Japanese thought (primarily Buddhism, but also Confucianism and Shinto). Although he was primarily based in Tokyo Imperial University, he was considered a peripheral member of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. His key works are his *Ethics* (Rinrigaku 倫理学) and his *History of Japanese Ethical Thought* (Nihon rinri shisōshi 日本倫理思想史) (See Heisig 2011 for biographical data).

Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-present) is a French philosopher who has taught in various universities around the world: the Institut de Philosophie in Strasbourg, the Freie Universität in Berlin, the University of California, and so on. He has written more than fifty books on a wide range of topics: commentaries on the works of key philosophers, writings on art and literature, and his original thought on politics, technology, and Christianity. He is heavily influenced by Heidegger, and is sometimes referred to as a neo-Heideggerian. His most famous works are perhaps *The Inoperative Community*, *Being Singular Plural*, and *The Experience of Freedom*. He also collaborated with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in 1980 to put up the *Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique*, which produced two important volumes on political philosophy (See James 2006 for biographical data).

Nancy does not seem to have studied Watsuji’s thought, and Watsuji died when Nancy was around 20. But while there is no direct connection between their thought, they share the influence of Heidegger, the concern for the relationship between the individual and the whole, and a specific focus on the problem of the nation-state (especially in light of World War II). Hence, I believe there is much that can be learned from a comparative study of these two thinkers.

At present there appears to be only one major work that tackles the relationship of Watsuji and Nancy, Prof. Sakai Naoki’s *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (1997). In this work, Prof. Sakai critically details the role Watsuji plays in schematizing the difference between Japan and other cultures, his failure to respect the differences between people and change in relationships, his totalitarian sense of community, etc., all situated within the context of Japan shortly before, during, and after the Pacific War. This criticism is heavily grounded in

Nancy's thought, which becomes clear in the 4th chapter where Sakai directly applies a Nancian critique to Watsuji's thought. While I agree with Prof. Sakai's critique, I wish to further contribute to the discussion here by more extensively comparing the parallels and points of conflict between the two thinkers, as well as seeing more positive ways to read Watsuji through Nancy's thought.

1.2 Watsuji's Ethics

Let me very briefly summarize the ethical system of Watsuji, which is found primarily in his *Ethics*, but also in his *Ethics as a Study of Ningen* (Ningen no gaku toshite no rinrigaku 人間の学としての倫理学). This ethics was constructed in a period when Japan was reeling from the disorientation of rapid modernization and westernization, and developed in the period immediately preceding and during the Pacific War. In this context, Watsuji tried to develop an ethics that opposed the "one-sided" individualism which he saw as prevalent in modernity. Hence, Watsuji defines ethics as the study of *ningen*, the Japanese word meaning both a human being (individual), but also all humankind (totality). Watsuji highlights this amphibology as one that expresses the *dual-structure* essential to human existence (Watsuji 1996, 12-15).

1. *The Negative Dual-Structure.* That human existence has a *dual-structure* simply means that human existence is always both individual and communal. Watsuji points out that while humans are individual, individuals are always in relation to others and are formed in every way (physiologically, emotionally, cognitively, epistemologically, etc.) by relationships. Hence while individuals exist, they have no independent existence. Watsuji uses the Buddhist term "empty" (kuu 空). Individuality is empty because it is formed by communality, and the standpoint of individuality is established only through negating the collective by individuating (Watsuji 1996, ch. 3 & 4). But in the same way, while we are communal beings, groups are always dependent on the presence, participation and commitment of individual members. Hence communality does not have independent existence either. Like individuality, it is empty. And also, the standpoint of the whole is established only through the negation of individuality by the suspension of the separateness of individuals through commitment. Hence the dual-structure of *ningen* states that human existence is both individual and communal (Watsuji 1996, ch. 5). Neither side alone can explain human existence. But both sides exist only in negating each other. Hence it can be described as a *negative dual-structure* (Watsuji 1996, ch. 6).

2. *Absolute Negativity and Ethics.* So how do we get from the above description of human existence to a prescriptive ethics? Watsuji's argument is a bit ambiguous on this point, but one way to interpret it would be through the idea

of *authenticity*. In order to be authentically *ningen*, we need to live out both our individuality and our communality. But because these two facets are mutually negating and interdependent, the only way we can live out both is to constantly carry out the movement of negation. We have to constantly prevent ourselves from being merely "dissolved into totalities" by individuating, and thus negating these collectives to retrieve a sense of self-awareness. But at the same time, we have to prevent ourselves from becoming merely detached and individualistic existents by re-committing to collectives or forming new relationships, and hence negating individuality once again. For Watsuji, this cycle continues infinitely (Watsuji 1996, ch. 7).

What we see here though is that the movement of negation is the very thing that these two antagonists have in common, that establishes each—both individuality and communality. Watsuji develops this conceptually as "absolute negativity" or "absolute emptiness," which becomes the ground for the fundamental law of ethics, the principle that allows *ningen* to exist as *ningen*. Watsuji writes:

The negative structure of human existence is, as previously stated, the *fundamental law* that makes human existence form itself as human existence. If we were to deviate from this fundamental law, human existence would no longer be capable of existing. This is why this law is the foundation of human existence. However, at the start, we defined the existential foundation of human communality, the *law of human existence*, as ethics. As such, the fundamental law itself must be said to be *fundamental ethics*. Fundamental ethics is the originary principle of the study of ethics. We can thus generally define the originary principle of the study of ethics as "the movement of the self-return of absolute negativity through negation." (own translation from Watsuji 1962, 181)

Humanity is true to itself through the principle of absolute negativity, by which totalities are *negated* to establish individuals, and individuals are *negated* in order to establish the whole. Each finite negation thus manifests absolute negativity/emptiness and expresses humanity's ethics of authenticity.

3. *Problems in Watsuji's Ethics.* While we cannot closely scrutinize Watsuji's ethics here, I would like to point out several problems therein. The first is a tendency to privilege totality over the individual. If we examine Watsuji's examples (in Watsuji 1996, ch. 3-5) we see that while it is clear that the individual needs the whole not merely to survive but for any sense of meaning, the individual appears to only be necessary for the continued existence of the whole. Looking at Watsuji's examples, one is left with a lingering doubt—does the individual really contribute

anything irreducibly individual to the whole, or is it just a necessary cog in the gears of the collective?

A second problem is a sense of ethical ambiguity in the movement of negation. In Watsuji's explanations, (Watsuji 1996, ch. 6-7) it seems like any negation of the whole that creates a sense of individuality manifests the "self-negation of emptiness," and any negation of the individual that establishes any collective manifests the "self-return of emptiness." He instantiates this with two religious examples, one of Buddha, and another of Jesus. Looking at the first: Siddhartha Gaotama, a) negated his family and kingdom to practice (self-negation of emptiness) and b) negated his solitary practice to form the *sangha* (self-return of emptiness). While this is clearly an ethical movement, how about a) negating the needs of your community for your own desires, or b) negating individuality to merely maintain a status quo? Do these two negations really manifest the authentic ethics of absolute negativity? Let us keep these questions in mind as we proceed to an overview of Nancy.

1.3 Nancy's Inoperative Community

In this section, I would like to briefly summarize the (proto) ethical ideas in Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1991). The original book was published in French with the title *La Communauté désœuvrée* (1983). While Watsuji's *Ethics* was primarily opposed to individualist discourses, Nancy's work moves from the opposite direction, working against totalitarian notions of communal identity. He accomplishes this through a focused critique of the idea of *immanence*.

It is precisely the immanence of man to man, or it is *man*, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence, that constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community. . . . Consequently, economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader*) represent or rather present, expose, and realize this essence necessarily in themselves. Essence is set to work in them; through them, it becomes its own work. This is what we have called "totalitarianism," but it might be better named "immanentism," as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets. (Nancy 1991, 3)

Immanence refers to when something is taken as a self-enclosed identity that exists for itself alone. Such a closed identity would reduce any sense of otherness/difference to its own order or rationality. Nancy criticizes the manifestation of

immanence in both individual subjects and communities.

1. *Against Immanent Subjectivity.* Nancy inherited the western critique of closed subjectivity & metaphysics—Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, etc. (See James 2006). For instance, for Heidegger, the immanent subject is incapable of dealing with its own mortality, and is unable to open up to the truth of Being. For Emmanuel Levinas, closed subjectivity (he uses the term "ego," as the word "subjectivity" has positive connotations for Levinas) is the origin of violence that refuses the otherness and transcendence of the face of the other. In his own take on the western critique of subjectivity, Nancy develops his own idea of *singularity*.

Singularity is a unique origin, irreducible to anything else or any other singularity. But for Nancy, a singularity cannot exist in itself and exists only in *inclining*, opening up to, and touching other singularities. Singularity is always plural—*plus*, more, beyond itself (See Nancy 1991, 7).

2. *Against Immanent Community.* Because of singularity's self-transcendence and plurality, it always opens up to community. But community is not immanent either! According to Nancy, people have always pined for a "lost community" in which people were bound tightly and shared a seamless sense of collective identity. But this immanent community is a myth, it has never existed (Nancy 1991, 9).

Further more, this immanent community is a *murderous* myth: the only way there can be true collective identity is if we try to eliminate all that makes us irreducibly individual, which means society taking over the individual's death. This is tantamount to the logic of sacrifice (Ex. "Die for your country," or German Nazism) (Nancy 1991, 12).

Against this myth of immanent community, Nancy intones the idea of "inoperative" or unworked community. Nancy writes:

Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence. Consequently, community is transcendence: but "transcendence," which no longer has any "sacred" meaning, signifying precisely a resistance to immanence (resistance to the communion of everyone or to the exclusive passion of one or several: to all the forms and all the violences of subjectivity). (Nancy 1991, 35)

What we see here is that community is not a collective *formed from* self-transcending singularities. Instead, the *transcendence itself* is community. Therefore community is nothing more than the liminal space by which singularities transcend themselves, touch, and share (*partage*) each other.

3. *Proto-Ethics in Inoperative Community.* It is difficult to speak of ethics in Nancy's *Inoperative Community*, precisely because such a community is not an

oeuvre, not a *telos*, not an ought that is achieved. It describes what we fundamentally *are*: being-singular-plural (See Nancy 2000). Hence the “task” is not to construct anything but to *unwork* immanence to return to this original space of being-with (Nancy 1991, 31). So perhaps one can speak of a *proto-ethics* within this idea of community. Let us look at two central proto-ethical ideas that take the place of the binary of evil and good: myth and literature.

Myth goes hand in hand with the immanence Nancy critiques. “Myth is not simple representation, it is representation at work, producing itself—in an autopoietic mimesis—as effect: it is fiction that founds. . . . In other words, the fashioning of a world for the subject, the becoming-world of subjectivity” (Nancy 1991, 56). Myth is any discourse, act, lifestyle, or policy that manufactures an illusion of immanence and closed identity, be it in an individual, in a select group, or in a general whole (ex. Myths of “chosen people”).

In opposition to myth, let us examine the idea of literature:

Being-in-common *is* literary, that is, . . . it has its very being in “literature” (in writing, in a certain voice, in a singular music, but also in a painting, in a dance, and in the exercise of thought), then what “literature” will have to designate is this being itself . . . in itself. In other words, [literature] would designate that singular ontological quality that *gives* being *in* common, that does not hold it in reserve . . . but that rather makes for a being that *is* only when shared *in common*, or rather whose quality of being, whose nature and structure are shared (or exposed). (Nancy 1991, 64)

Literature refers to anything that reinscribes the fundamental openness and irreducible singularity that constitutes our human existence. Literature interrupts myth.

2. Re-reading Watsuji’s *Ethics from Nancy’s Inoperative Community*

In the previous sections, I have briefly sketched out the core ethical theory in Watsuji’s *Ethics* and Nancy’s *Inoperative Community*. We have seen some parallels in the two thinkers. Both of them stress that human existence has two facets: Individuality:totality and singularity:plurality. Both facets can be seen to be empty & insubstantial, not existing in themselves and opening up to their self-negation. Also, both show how substantializing or adhering to either facet (as closed immanence) results in the inauthenticity of human being. Hence, ethics can be unanimously seen as a need to resist this substantialization of the individual or the totality.

However, despite these similarities, essential differences are highlighted if

we examine how they differ in their response to Martin Heidegger’s idea of being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tode*).

2.1 On Heidegger’s Being-Toward-Death

Let us briefly sketch out Heidegger’s notion of Being-Toward-Death. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out several things about the phenomenon of death. First, it is impossible to have an experience of my own death. The minute I experience death, I am dead and hence no longer capable of experience. Yet despite this “inaccessibility to experience,” death is imminent in every moment of this mortal life. Furthermore, I do not truly experience death in the face of other people dying, because it is not my death. Only I can die my own death. Hence, death is seen as one’s “ownmost non-relational” possibility. Nobody can take it from me. As such, facing one’s death is facing something that only the individual can face. It hence individuates the person, wrenches him from any dissolution into a herd (*das Man*) and allows him to be authentic (Heidegger 2010, 237-266).

1. *Watsuji’s Response*. For Watsuji, Heidegger’s view of death and authenticity is too individualistic. Rather, the proper limit of Dasein is not death but other people, the totality of *ningen*, which “although inclusive of ‘being-toward-death’, is also that totality that goes beyond death” (Watsuji 1996, 224). As to this totality, Watsuji writes, “We are now able to call this totality of *ningen* the authentic self. But the authentic self in this case is the superindividual subject . . . The authentic self must consist in the nondual relation of the self and other” (Watsuji 1996, 225). Furthermore, it is because of the totality of *ningen* that preparedness for death is meaningful, because facing death with courage allows one to serve others fully.

2. *Nancy’s Response*. Nancy generally agrees with Heidegger that death is always one’s own, and that one cannot experience one’s own death, even in the death of others. But at the same time, he agrees with Georges Bataille’s opposing idea that the only way we catch a glimpse of death is through others, and it only because we share death that there can be community (See James 2006, 180). The result of trying to combine these tensional views is a unique treatment of the experience of the death of another:

I recognize that in the death of the other there is nothing recognizable. And this is how sharing—and finitude—can be inscribed: “The ending implied in death does not signify a *Dasein*’s Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-toward-the-end* of this entity.” The similitude of the like-being is made in the encounter of “beings toward the end” that his end, *their* end, in each case “mine” (or “yours”), *assimilates and separates in the same limit*, at which or on which they compare. (Nancy 1991, 33)

One can schematize Nancy's view of death with four aspects. 1) I realize that the death of the other is not my death and is incomprehensible to me: an experience of inassimilable alterity. 2) I realize that I too am capable of dying. 3) I realize that the other is being-toward-death and I am being-toward-death. This sharing and solidarity means I cannot ignore the death of another. 4) I realize that though we share this finitude, my death is distinct and irreducible to the death of the other and vice versa, and thus this sharing cannot be assimilated into an identity.

These four aspects detail the rupture of the subject and the self-transcendence of the singularity into community. In contrast to Watsuji's view, Nancy writes, "Community does not sublimate the finitude it exposes." It does not make the death of the individual subservient to the whole. Rather, "Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition. It is the community of finite beings, and as such it is itself a finite community" (Nancy 1991, 26-27). Hence community is none other than the space where the irreducibly singular experience of death is shared.

3. *Watsuji vs Nancy*. Both Watsuji and Nancy see that beyond one's death is opening up to others and community. But Watsuji, in articulating this passage, ignores the individuality of death and sublimes it to the "immortality" of the totality of *ningen*. On the other hand, Nancy articulates this passage by showing that death itself is singular-plural, and hence both opens up the subject toward the other, but at the same time preserves its irreducible singularity. I think this difference is key to answering the doubts I raised surrounding Watsuji's *Ethics*.

2.2 Re-Reading Watsuji's *Ethics*

After the discussion of Watsuji's ethics, I raised two main concerns. First was Watsuji's tendency to privilege the totality over the individual, with individuality seeming to be a next to meaningless detour on the road to the self-establishment of the absolute whole. And second was the lack of specificity in the articulation of the mutual negation of the individual and the whole, which led to ambiguities in the ethical application of the fundamental law of absolute negativity. In response to this, Nancy's greatest contribution to this discourse on ethics of emptiness is in the way he articulates the phenomenon of finitude, such that it specifies the structure of the transcendence of singularity that demands its sociality, as well as the structure of the irreducible alterity of each singularity that resists any assimilation into a collective.

1. *Re-reading the dual-structure*. In this articulation of finitude, how might we re-read the emptiness of the individual in the dual-structure of *ningen*? Watsuji focused on the ontic fact that the whole shapes the individual. But just because the whole shapes me does not mean I ought not to turn my back on the whole. Perhaps it is more sensible if we focus not on the ontic relatedness of the individual to others but on the self-transcendence that is necessary in our reckoning with finitude:

Because a singularity is finite, it cannot be a subject, an individual. Because it is mortal, there always remains a facet of existence that is shrouded from experience, a facet that exceeds the subject's attempt to reduce everything to the same. And because this mortality is discovered alongside the mortality of others, we are called out of ourselves to be responsible for the death of our fellow beings, to walk alongside them as they face their own finitude, to be part of community.

But in the same way, how might we re-read the emptiness of the totality? Watsuji focused on the dependence of the whole on the survival, participation, and commitment of individuals, giving very little indication as to why the whole ought to respect the individuality of individuals. Here, perhaps it is useful to shift our gaze to something irreducibly singular that each member brings to the whole: In the transcendence that rejects the isolated subject, community is formed, a community of finitude, an unworked community. But because death always belongs to each and every person, and cannot be abdicated to another, then each individual is called to face his or her own death as a singularity. And because the death that we see in the dying of another is never our own death, we are called to respect the alterity of the other and see the other as an irreducible singularity as well.

What we see here is a re-reading of Watsuji's notion of the dual-structure of *ningen*. Not only does the whole shape individuals, but one's reckoning with death necessarily leads one outside oneself in solidarity with others. Not only do individuals participatively sustain community, but a community owes its existence purely to a death that is singular and irreducible to a collective identity.

2. *Re-reading emptiness*. With this, the word "emptiness" as in the emptiness of individuality and the emptiness of totality, acquires a different connotation. No longer is emptiness merely about the ontic fact of dependence on one's other (as the totality is the individual's other, and the individual is the totality's other). Nor is it reduced to the insubstantiality that arises from the fact that one can only exist by negating its other. Instead, *emptiness is in that in being self, in realizing self, one must face and embrace the "other."* It means that for individuality to have a hold of itself, it must make way for the whole, and for the whole to be what it is, it must respect the particularity of singularities. This is something that while Watsuji did not develop, perhaps he could agree with, for Watsuji himself wrote, "This negation [of the totality] is also the self-awareness of that totality" (Watsuji 1996, 22). Also, "Only by abandoning independence is it possible for the *I* to obtain the self-awareness of *I*" (Watsuji 1996, 83).

3. *Re-reading the movement of double-negation*. If emptiness is in the need to face and embrace the other that lies at the limit of self, then the movement of double-negation cannot be one of negating totality to *establish* the individual wholesale or of negating individuality to establish the totality wholesale. If individuality and

totality are empty in the first place, why is there a need to establish it?

However, perhaps Watsuji's contribution is that, in a world where individualism is real (and collectivism is real), the establishment of the individual or the collective can be necessary moments in *resisting* the immanence of the individual or the totality. In other words, it is not so much as establishing both the individuality and the communality of *ningen*, but of resisting egotism and totalization that obscure being singular plural.

Furthermore, while to a certain extent it is necessary to establish singularity, this is very different from establishing individuality wholesale. As I have mentioned previously in the problems concerning the specificity of Watsuji's mechanism, establishing individuality wholesale can mean many noble things, but far more ignoble things, such as establishing individual desires-fixations, profit-monopoly, control-domination. But in light of Nancy's articulation of the phenomenon of finitude, establishing singularity means establishing the irreducibility of the singularity's facing its own finitude, and how this self-transcendence shapes the way the singularity participates in how others face their finitude. Nancy's view restricts negation to a purely ethical form, and better describes even Watsuji's examples (such as how Siddhartha Gaotama turned his back on his kingdom and how Jesus Christ refused many conventions of his Jewish community).

In the same way, while it is necessary to establish relationality/plurality, this differs from the wholesale establishment of a totality. For once again, an immanent totality, like a subject, possesses its own ambitions and tyrannical drives, and while establishing these do "negate individuality," they do so in a largely unethical way. Instead, establishing plurality means uncovering the phenomenon of the death of the other, and the responsibility it demands from the individual in sharing in this path of beings-toward-death. It means reminding all of us that we are finite *together*, and we cannot turn a blind eye to the fate of our fellows. Again, Nancy's view gives negation a specifically ethical form, which sheds further insight into Watsuji's examples of the formation of the Buddhist *sangha* and the early Christian community.

4. *Re-reading the position of absolute negativity.* If negation is not about *establishing* individuality and totality but rather about *resisting* the self-immanence of each, then perhaps absolute emptiness as absolute negativity is not both self and other, (or both individual and totality) but also *neither-nor*. Let us re-read Watsuji's key paragraph:

If this totality is the negation of separateness [of individuals], then "absolute totality," which transcends the finite and relative totality, is the absolute negation of separateness. Because of its being absolute, it must be that

non-separateness which negates the very distinction between separateness and non-separateness. Hence, absolute wholeness is absolute negation and absolute emptiness. (Watsuji 1996, 99, translation amended)

By negating the very distinction between individuality and totality, can individuality remain as individuality and totality remain as totality? Must individuality not become singularity, and totality become plurality? Here singular and plural are no longer opposed but are one as being singular plural. As such, absolute emptiness as being singular plural would be the "excluded middle" between the individual and the totality, a neither-nor that in our forgetfulness loses its orbit and spills into the immanent excesses of individuality and totality.

5. *Further questions.* Beyond what little I have discussed above, there are many more points of convergence/divergence of Watsuji and Nancy. For one, while Watsuji does have "totalitarian" tendencies, his notion of the whole and his articulations of trust and so on are much more detailed in ways that Nancy's articulations of the public sphere are not. While this paper focused on a re-reading of Watsuji from Nancy's texts, the reverse is also possible. Some questions that might be raised are: While a community of finite individuals cannot become an immanent subject, can it form a collective singularity? If it can, than does this not require a certain degree of loss of independence in commitment, one that Nancy's *Inoperative Community* does not account for? There are also other fields that might be questioned. Beyond the core ethical/communal ideas of both thinkers are their articulations of application: How might Nancy respond to Watsuji's discussions of family, friendship, and the state, as present in the latter volumes of *Rinrigaku*? How might Watsuji respond to Nancy's discussions concerning the war, politics, and globalization? Both Watsuji and Nancy have many writings on shared interests as well: space, the body, art, Christianity, Nietzsche, and so on. Perhaps other interested scholars might wish to work on these questions as well.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed the core structure of Watsuji Tetsurō's *Ethics* and Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*. Despite some main structural similarities, the essential differences of both works were revealed through an analysis of their differing responses to Martin Heidegger's being-toward-death. With such revealed, it became possible to re-read Watsuji's *Ethics* from Nancy's framework. In particular, the notions of the dual-structure, emptiness, the movement of double-negation, and the position of absolute negativity were rethought from the point of view of being-singular-plural. With this re-reading, it became possible to resolve the doubts

concerning the totalitarian tendencies in Watsuji's thought and the ethical ambiguity of the notion of negation.

Let us return to Prof. Victoria's questions: "Can Buddhism overcome nationalism? Should Buddhism overcome nationalism? If so, how?" In so far as Buddhism is a religion of dislocating subjectivity and emptying ego, the history of its usage in supporting ego at a national level is a shocking travesty. (But of course such a description of Buddhism is itself historically conditioned, largely by the modernization and westernization of Buddhism, and is hence not necessarily appropriate for describing many of the forms of Buddhism in Japan, as well as elsewhere.)

Even if we presume the discipline of emptying ego as essential to Buddhism, we can see (as in Watsuji's *Ethics*) that even this idea can be bent to serve totalitarian, imperialist, and fascist regimes. A key deciding factor is the structure by which finitude is articulated: Is finitude seen as shared, as individual, or both?

If the notion of finitude is articulated merely as the end of self amidst an immortal whole, the path of facing finitude can be used as a means to absorb the self into a higher self—the ego of a nation. On the other hand, if the notion of finitude is articulated as purely individual, then whatever spiritual resources there may be in the discipline of facing this finitude, these cannot be carried over to any socio-ethical dimension. However, I argue that if finitude is articulated as *both* shared *and* irreducibly singular and personal, then any discipline of facing finitude becomes a resistance against ego on any level, including a national one.

With this, I hope to share what is no more than a hint, one piece in the Buddhist problem of collective ego. Of course, what I have presented is nothing but a theory. By itself it is incapable of overcoming the problems it seeks to confront. But in trust, I leave it to other scholars, teachers, and practitioners to develop the other unexplored areas that remain—other facets of finitude (other than death), the *actual practice* of facing singular-plural finitude, other factors in the essential relationship of individuals and communities, historical concerns (surrounding Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy, and nationalism) and of course criticisms of this theory itself.

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