

# Watsuji's Reading of Hegel

## Modernity as a Philosophical Problem in Watsuji's *Rinrigaku*

Hans Peter LIEDERBACH

Raising the systematic (not historical) question for what meaning the problem of modernity/modernism has for Japanese philosophy and its interpretation,<sup>1</sup> requires situating oneself within a field of highly contested problems. On one side, this field is delineated by the modern aspiration for radical self-determination of thought, judgment, and agency, as claimed by the philosophers of German Idealism. On the other side, the boundary is marked by the anti-modern counterclaims, according to which the modern project had led to nihilism and has brought about a profound loss of meaning for modern man, the most well-known proponents of this camp being Heidegger, Rorty, Vattimo, and Derrida, all of whom are

1. From a Western perspective, the problem of modernity might be assessed as “vexing (if not overworked)” (PINKARD 2003, 187). In Japan, “modernity” is far from being overworked, but a theme of long-running success not only in studies in culturalism but also in philosophy.

drawing from Nietzsche.<sup>2</sup> These contestations cover a wide range of extremely complicated issues concerning language, meaning, agency, value, historicity, subjectivity, and others, of which giving even the most provisional account would go far beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is fair to say that the reassessment of “modernism as a philosophical problem” (Robert B. Pippin’s phrase) has led to results that should make us cautious about claims such as that language signifies nothing, that coherent meaning and the notion of the subject are delusions, and the like; we should also be wary of sweeping assertions of “the end of philosophy,” “the other beginning of thinking,” brought about by an “enowning” (*Ereignis*) which is not at man’s disposal.<sup>3</sup>

This criticism of modernity resonates with a strand in Japanese philosophy which aims at deconstructing the very foundations of modern Western thought, that is the notion of the self-determining subject and its upshot, the conception of dualism with all its facets in epistemology and practical philosophy. This strand is best represented by the philosophers of the Kyoto School, beginning with Nishida Kitarō. It was formed against the backdrop of the modernization of Japan. The sense of cultural loss associated with the profound changes in society, economy, and politics was articulated not only by literates like Natsume Sōseki<sup>4</sup> and critics like Kobayashi Hideo,<sup>5</sup> but also by Japanese philosophers. The most explicit link between the philosoph-

2. I am aware that these are oversimplifications. For one thing, there are distinctions to be made regarding the tradition of German Idealism; for another, the camp of the post- and anti-modernists is not as homogeneous as suggested here. Moreover, the critique of instrumental reason by Adorno and Horkheimer should be considered as should the more nuanced position of Charles Taylor. However, since these distinctions have no bearings for my argument, I’ll leave it with this proviso.

3. PIPPIN 1991, 1997; TAYLOR 1989, 1991; LARMORE 1996.

4. In his novels like *Kokoro* and *The Wayfarer*, Sōseki depicts the tensions between the modern aspiration for individual self-determination and self-realization and the moral demands from a still largely traditional society. For a theoretical discussion of the modernity-problem with reference to Japan see his lecture on “The Enlightenment of Modern Japan” (SŌSEKI 1911).

5. For Kobayashi’s stance towards modernity see DORSEY 2008.

ical objections against the modern project and the criticism of modern Western culture in general has been made in the symposium on "Overcoming Modernity."<sup>6</sup> It could be argued that the philosophical significance of the claims made by Nishitani Keiji, Kōsaka Masaaki and other members of the Kyoto School in those days (and after) have yet to be properly appreciated.<sup>7</sup> However, for this time I shall content myself with the remark that what I regard as the most important point on this plane is not so much the political commitment of members of the Kyoto School for Japanese wartime ultra-nationalism (although this too is a hotly contested issue), but rather (a) the assertion that Western modernity had reached a philosophical impasse and (b) the subsequent claim that Japanese philosophy could provide a solution for this problem. Since it was Heidegger, who, with his dictum of the end of philosophy, had proclaimed this impasse and inaugurated an other beginning of thinking, it is not surprising that the constellation "Japan and Heidegger" has become prominent among those pursuing post-modern aspirations, not only in Japan but also among Western scholars.<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking, it is characteristic for this strand of research to associate the anti-Cartesian position in Heidegger with anti-modernistic claims.<sup>9</sup> Also, research stressing the significance,

6. KAWAKAMI and TAKEUCHI 1979. For an English translation of the contributions to the symposium see CALICHMAN 2008.

7. In contrast, the historical background and the political implications of these endeavors are well documented; cf. HEISIG and MARALDO 1994, GOTO-JONES 2007. For a pointed, and hence not unproblematic reading of the contributions to the symposium, see HAROOTUNIAN 2000, 34–94.

8. BUCHNER 1989, BUCHHEIM 1989, MAY 1989, PARKES 1990, WEINMAYR 1992.

9. For the purpose of this paper, the term anti-Cartesianism designates a position that rejects the notion that rendering intelligible any relation between human beings, humanity and the world, and the subjective self-relation of human beings must be reducible to mental representations authored by the subject. Among the problems the rejection of subjectivism in the sense of reductive foundationalism entails, the demand for providing an alternative foundation or principle for philosophical thought (or deconstructing this very demand) is the most challenging one. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger tried to respond to it by elucidating the temporal structure of being-there, whereas Watsuji put his hopes on the dialectics of dual negation and on the notion of spatiality.

Nishida, Nishitani, Kuki, Watsuji et al. could have for current philosophy (which is not directly related to the Japan-Heidegger constellation but still subscribes to anti-Cartesianism) is conducted in the hope to contribute to a new paradigm of thinking that is deemed necessary to overcome the impasse, Western civilization has led to.<sup>10</sup>

While I agree with Heidegger and his followers in Japan and the West that “the dialogue with the East-Asian world” (and other worlds) has become “unavoidable,”<sup>11</sup> I doubt whether this dialogue has to be made against the backdrop of a Heideggerian diagnosis of modernity. That is, because the significance of Japanese philosophy can be proven independently of claims about the impasse of Western philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, taking into account constellations other than that of “Heidegger (or any other post-metaphysical thinker) and Japan” can provide a fresh outlook on the philosophical problem of modernity. This is the case with the constellation of Watsuji and Hegel.

#### WATSUJI AND MODERNITY

Watsuji’s ethical thought has been repeatedly interpreted with reference to modernity. For many scholars in the fields of sociology, history of ideas, and Japanese studies, Watsuji is one of those early Shōwa-philosophers who were, if not aiming at an “overcoming of modernity,” at least highly critical of modern Western culture and its philosophical foundations and, hence, resorted for some premodern form of social and cultural life. For instance, in a seminal paper, Robert N. Bellah describes Watsuji’s thought as giving expression to “a crucial aspect of the problem of Japan’s cultural identity,” namely “its profound resistance to the differentiation of the cultural and the social system and correlatively to the differentiation of social system and per-

10. BERQUE 1982, 2000A, 2000B; DAVIS, 2003; UEDA 2011; KRUMMEL 2015.

11. HEIDEGGER 1954, 43.

12. Cf. LIEDERBACH 2016, 9–34.

sonality.”<sup>13</sup> That is to say, after a short period of being attracted to such “individualistic” thinkers like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Watsuji “did turn his back on individualism and return in his own way to the warm *Gemeinschaft* community of Japanese life.”<sup>14</sup> In a more polemical vein, Peter N. Dale points out that Watsuji shrank away from facing the harsh reality of “mature modernity.”<sup>15</sup> For Harry Harootunian, he is one of those Japanese philosophers who were “overcome by modernity,” in that his “critique of mass society” led him to a “theory of ethics [that] promoted not just exceptionalism but a notorious exclusivism with wide-ranging consequences.”<sup>16</sup> Kumano Sumihiko describes Watsuji’s ethical thought as an attempt to “return” to a pre-modern ideal of communal life,<sup>17</sup> while Koyasu Nobukuni succinctly rates it as “another ‘overcoming of modernity.’”<sup>18</sup>

Apparently, these explanations conceive of modernity as something positively given that could serve as an objective standard of what modern institutions and practices ought to consist in. Against this standard, Watsuji’s rendering of the family, the society, and the state can be judged as no other than as anti-modern, that is as an account of failed modernity. On this basis, there is ample evidence in Watsuji’s works that could be brought in to underpin this strand of criticism. His dialectic of dual negation and, accordingly, his notion of human existence that puts a one-sided emphasis on its totality at the cost of its individual aspect, his notion of authenticity, and, in connection with this, his rendering of death—seemingly they are all suitable to give evidence to his failure of coming to grips with (Western) modernity. And yet, this view is problematic inasmuch as it falls short of appreciating Watsuji’s anti-Cartesianism, that is his struggle with the genuine philo-

13. BELLAH 1965, 136.

14. BELLAH 1965, 131.

15. DALE 1989, 73.

16. HAROOTUNIAN 2001, 250–1.

17. KUMANO 2009, 73.

18. KOYASU 2010.

sophical significance of modernity. This cannot be an object of inquiry as in mainstream social science, or the history of ideas, but rather of an approach that draws on the subjective self-understanding of what it means to be modern (and this implies a historical narrative of how “we” have become to understand ourselves in that way). Moreover, the sociological as well as the history-of-idea viewpoint shuts out another viable reading of modernity of which, as I shall claim, Watsuji was an early proponent. More than half a century prior to S. N. Eisenstadt’s coinage of “multiple modernities,”<sup>19</sup> Watsuji was struggling with the problem of how to make sense of Japanese modernity without having to rely on a quasi-empirical notion of modernity. Put differently, his attempts implicitly were aiming at giving an account of how we could philosophically justify the notion of multiple modernities. This is to say, despite being anti-Cartesian, Watsuji did not adopt an anti-modern stance. To appreciate his attempts, we have to inquire into Watsuji’s reading of Hegel. It could be argued that Hegel too was anti-Cartesian and at the same time, was anything but anti-modern.<sup>20</sup> In consequence, the inquiry will require an exploration that goes beyond the established framework of Watsuji scholarship that, for coming to grips with his anti-Cartesianism, has mainly focused on his critical appropriation of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.

#### ANTI-CARTESIANISM IN HEIDEGGER AND WATSUJI

The focus on the constellation “Watsuji and Heidegger” coincides with Watsuji’s self-interpretation. In the often-cited foreword of *Fūdo*, he gives Heidegger credit for having drawn his attention to the problem of human existence and its spatio-temporal foundation (see WTZ 8: 1–2). In Heidegger, Watsuji had found powerful arguments fostering his anti-Cartesian intuition that problems of ethics

19. EISENSTADT 2000.

20. This claim is defended by PIPPIN 1997, 375–94.

and practical philosophy demand a specific treatment that is fundamentally different from how they had been rendered in the modern Western tradition. Therefore, in analogy to the project of *Being and Time*, where, prior to posing the question of being, the being of being-there (*Dasein*) that is asking this very question, has to be clarified, Watsuji's *Ethics* departs with an inquiry into the structure of human existence, which ought to provide the basis for examining modern forms of ethical life and their corresponding institutions. However, in that Watsuji determines human existence as "betweenness" (間柄 *aidagara*), his version of anti-Cartesianism differs significantly from Heidegger's. "Betweenness" is meant to designate human existence as fundamentally relational being. Whereas, for Heidegger, being-there is a being for whom its being is always an issue in terms of self-relation, for Watsuji this issue cannot be dealt with in an entirely self-relational mode, but must include relations to others. Put differently, human beings cannot but exist and, what is more important, obtain authentic self-understanding in some relationship with others, and this has to provide the starting point for any philosophical inquiry into what it is to be human. Hence, for Watsuji, being anti-Cartesian means first and foremost to reject methodological individualism. In this respect, the first sentence of the *Ethics* is unambiguous:

The primary significance of the attempt to describe the ethical as the study of "man as betweenness" consists in getting away from the modern misconception that conceives of the ethical as a problem of individual consciousness *only*. (W<sup>T</sup>Z 10: 11; R, 9)

According to Watsuji, the Western philosophical tradition since Descartes has failed to acknowledge this point (the only exception being Hegel; I will come back to this later), Heidegger being only the last representative in a long genealogy of philosophers of so-called individualism (see W<sup>T</sup>Z 10: 185–6; R, 176).

Watsuji's revision of "being-there" leads him to far-reaching modifications of Heidegger's project, which, in turn, have given rise to

severe criticism. For instance, some have said that Watsuji's notion of transcendence is not as radical as that in *Being and Time*, since it neither takes into account the momentum of "self liberation,"<sup>21</sup> which is prominent in Heidegger, nor acknowledges "the possibility of a new disclosure of the world."<sup>22</sup> Others have also pointed out that Watsuji "seems to have reduced the existential structure of being-there to its thrownness."<sup>23</sup> Along the same line runs the argument of Yuasa Yasuo who states that, in the *Ethics*, "death is taken only as death of the other."<sup>24</sup> According to these (and other) "Heideggerian" readings, the inconsistencies in the *Ethics* can be traced back to Watsuji's misunderstanding of the ontological meaning of being-there. As Mine aptly puts it: "Viewed from Heidegger, Watsuji really had no good understanding of the ontological difference."<sup>25</sup> In other words, a lack of what can be called metaphysical commitment in Watsuji endangers his project of an ethical theory that, to be successful, has to break completely, that is, ontologically, with Cartesianism. Accordingly, for unfolding the potential of Watsuji's ethical thought, "his understanding of 'transcendence' has to be revised" in Heideggerian terms, since "Heidegger's claim that only if there is an insight into the metaphysical dimension of selfhood, the truth of an ontic betweenness of 'I' and 'Thou' comes into existence, cannot be ignored, as it not only preserves the ontological (philosophical) possibility of existence, but also the ontic possibility of tension between individual and communality in betweenness."<sup>26</sup>

This revision is deemed necessary not only for amending conceptual inconsistencies in Watsuji, but also for making explicit (and further developing) his "intuitive insight."<sup>27</sup> This insight points at a fundamental difficulty in Heidegger's project of *Being and Time*, namely

21. MINE 2002, 91.

22. MINE 2002, 93.

23. LIEDERBACH 2001, 128.

24. YUASA 1995, 352. Cf. KUMANO 2007, 393-4.

25. MINE 2002, 91.

26. MINE 2002, 97.

27. MINE 2002, 114.



a concealed “will to self-foundation.”<sup>28</sup> One of the most important achievements of this project, the claim that truth is never to be conceived of as total transparency of an object of knowledge, but only as disclosure which inevitably goes along with hiddenness, is itself taken back in the discussion of “ownness” (*Eigentlichkeit*) when, in “anticipatory resoluteness” (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*), “being-there” makes fully transparent its own ontological structure that, surely against Heidegger’s own intentions, is void of temporal and historical concreteness.<sup>29</sup>

Against this backdrop, Watsuji’s attempt to amend the notion of “being-there,” so that “thrownness” and “project” are equally taken into account as are “future” and “having beenness” by stressing the spatial aspect of human existence, ultimately must fail because it misses the metaphysical dimension of these problems and, hence, does not suffice to overcome the modern project of philosophical self-foundation and, subsequently, the modern will to self-determination. (In fact, Watsuji never accused Heidegger or any other philosopher of representing such a metaphysical will.) However, as I believe, this does not invalidate Watsuji’s observations and counterclaims as such. As a reassessment of Watsuji’s anti-Cartesianism will show, his insight in the problematic aspects of Heidegger opens up possibilities for rendering the modernity-problem that the Heideggerian readings necessarily conceal but can still be appreciated through a Hegelian reading of Watsuji. At least, this is the thesis I wish to defend.

At the outset of such a reassessment, it is necessary to note that Watsuji’s modifications of Heidegger are done in a Hegelian spirit. At least three points can be mentioned to demonstrate this point. First, the insight in Heidegger’s insufficiently determined “being-with” (*Mitsein*), informs Watsuji’s critique of atomism which is clearly inspired by Hegel. According to Watsuji, Hegel’s criticism of Hobbes in the

28. MINE 1991, 35.

29. On this point, see FIGAL 1992, 101.

*Naturrechtsaufsatz* (1802–1803) “is, on one hand, a [constructive] criticism of the standpoint of empiricism, while, on the other hand, it is also a [constructive] criticism of the individualistic understanding of man” (WTZ 9: 90–1; cf. WTZ 10: 88–90). Watsuji acknowledges Hegel’s criticism as “constructive” insofar as it mirrors his own notion of the dual structure of human existence, that is betweenness. This is to say, both Watsuji and Hegel coincide in the view that the early modern approach to ethics and political philosophy (particularly the theories of contract) is problematic inasmuch as it solely stresses the individualistic aspect of humanity. However, neither Hegel nor Watsuji want to do away with the individual as such, but with a one-sided, abstract notion of it.<sup>30</sup> Neither individuality nor totality, says Watsuji, “has precedence.” (WTZ 10: 107; R, 102)

Second, Watsuji’s insight into the problematically ahistorical structure of “being-there” leads him to a notion of “ownness” (本来性) that is similar to Charles Taylor’s concept of authenticity,<sup>31</sup> which, in turn, is an offshoot of Hegel’s insight into the structure of freedom as institutionally grounded freedom.<sup>32</sup> As Taylor holds, our attempts for achieving authenticity without paying attention “(a) to the demands of our ties with others, or (b) to demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations are self-defeating,” because “they destroy the conditions for realizing authenticity

30. “As a result, even though our betweenness-oriented being subsists between one individual and another, we cannot posit the individual as an individualistic being whose existence precedes the already existing betweenness” (WTZ 10: 88; R, 83). “But is it justifiable to wipe out completely the independence of the individual and to waste no time in expounding, in place of it, the independence of the social group?” (WTZ 10: 92; R, 86; tr. slightly altered). “It is not justifiable for us to insist on the existence of a social group’s independence” (WTZ 10: 106; R, 99).

31. TAYLOR 1991.

32. “The right of individuals to their subjective determination to freedom is fulfilled in so far as they belong to ethical actuality” (PR, §153). Cf. WTZ 10: 28: “Trust and truth and freedom and justice appear here [i.e., in the structure of solidarity, understood as special forms in which the law of human existence has become concrete] in their special form and by name” (R, 24–5; trans. altered).

itself.”<sup>33</sup> This is to say, leading an authentic life that remains true to one's self is possible only within a horizon of shared language, meaning, and values, which is also a necessary condition for being recognized by others as an authentic individual. Watsuji's explanations overlap with Taylor's view insofar as he too stresses the importance of a shared horizon for making authenticity possible. The problem of death is the ready example. Contrary to Heidegger, Watsuji claims that for human beings there is no such thing like death as being void of any shared meaning. Death, he thinks, can be meaningful only inasmuch as it is carried by institutionalized practices like “one's last moments, the deathwatch, the funeral, a tomb, a Buddhist service held after forty-nine days in which a bereaved family, relatives, and friends participate” (WTZ 10: 233; R, 219). What, from an existentialistic point of view, looks deeply inauthentic, based on a misunderstanding of the ontological meaning of “ownness,” makes perfectly sense from a perspective that emphasizes the ethical (*sittlich*) dimension of human existence. This means that transparent self-understanding is possible only within the context of common practices.<sup>34</sup>

Third, the notion of authenticity leads Watsuji to develop a conception that understands human agency in terms of “expressivism.”<sup>35</sup> That is, Watsuji rejects any causal explanation of human action as “beside the point” (WTZ 10: 249; R, 238). Causal explanations cannot do justice to the relational character of agency. To act means, for Watsuji, to give expression to the relation within which this action is carried out. Since agency is mediated by “gestures, motions, and language” (*ibid.*; R, 237; trans. altered) that belong to a form of ethical life of which they are expressions, human agency as such is an expression

33. TAYLOR 1991, 35

34. Defending this claim would, however, require an account of how “we” came to regard these practices as enhancing, not impeding, an authentic existence. This lies beyond the scope of this paper. For an overview of what is involved here, see PIPPIN 2014.

35. In his influential book on Hegel, Charles Taylor introduces this term for characterizing Hegel's conception of agency; see TAYLOR 1975, 80–7.

of this life-form. Says Watsuji: “Not only gestures, facial expressions, demeanor, and so forth but also language, custom, life-forms, and so on are all expressions of betweenness; and they make up the moments that constitute it” (WTZ 10: 38; R, 35; trans. slightly altered). Agency is, then, nothing that, like an event in the world of nature, could be observed and objectively described from a third person’s perspective, but rather something that has to be made sense of from the agent’s point of view, while form and content of these sense-making practices are shared between the subjects involved. In this respect, Watsuji holds “the view that the practical interconnectedness of acts already contains a practical understanding within itself” (WTZ 10: 38; R, 35).<sup>36</sup> That is to say, forms of betweenness are in a constant process of formation, transformation, reformulation, and so forth; hence, they cannot be something given, but must be something constructed. To express this, Watsuji uses the term 形成, formation (*Bildung* in German); (see WTZ 8: 12). This means, betweenness must not be equated with traditional forms of ethical life, to which the individual has to submit itself. Rather, the norms of practices derive from the constantly interpreted and re-formed horizon of common understanding.

The three moments outlined above have a historical dimension in common. Betweenness itself is historical (and also, as we shall see later, climatical) being.<sup>37</sup> Due to “the historicity of betweenness” (WTZ 8: 18), the formation of forms of life is always historically mediated. That is, formation “does not happen just between a present we.... We take possession of the understanding that has been accumulated since the times of our ancestors” (WTZ 8: 12). Hence, “betweenness proceeds continuously into the future” (WTZ 8: 18). In other words, forms of

36. This kind of understanding is not some intersubjectivity in an epistemological sense, but points at a shared normative horizon, the backdrop against which practices can be experienced as realizable and significant/meaningful.

37. Accordingly, in the inquiry into the temporal structure of human existence, Watsuji stresses the temporal mode of having beenness. This is directed against Heidegger’s emphasis of the mode of future; see WTZ 10: 195–9; R, 186–90.

communal life are subject to constant historical interpretation. The present forms of ethical life are derived from the historicity of betweenness, the life containing specific ideals of authenticity, which are preserved, passed on, and transformed through common practices. These ethical and practical determinations are at the very center of Watsuji's anti-Cartesianism; as we will see in the next section, they are meant to address problems that did arise from his experience of modernity. In the *Ethics*, he aims at giving a philosophical account of how modern institutions are constituted, what their functions consist in, and how the individual is related to them, all of which is based on the elucidation of human existence as betweenness.<sup>38</sup>

#### DIALECTICS

As early as in 1913, Watsuji formulates two interconnected problems that inspire the development of his ethical thought. In a text called "Memorandum," he writes: "Is, within modern, incoherent social life, unity possible?" (WTZ Bekkan I, 39). Watsuji emphatically

38. Although, for discussing these problems, Watsuji employs a Heideggerian vocabulary, it is difficult to see how by resorting to the analytics of being-there in *Being and Time*, these problems could be adequately addressed, let alone solved. One could even ask whether Watsuji, in drawing so heavily from Heidegger, did himself a disservice. The lack of historical concreteness in Heidegger is but one reason for the limits of discussing the problems of the *Ethics* within the framework of *Being and Time*. Heidegger always puts emphasis on the fact that his analytics of being-in-the-world was not meant to give a historically concrete account of late modern Western society and its pathologies, the infamous "they" (*das Man*) being a prospective candidate for such a pathology (cf. *Being and Time*, ch. 5 B). Another and more profound reason is that Heidegger's insights into the ontological structure of being-there cannot be applied to the problems Watsuji wants to address without causing serious tensions. The issue of authenticity is but the most prominent one. Even more important is the problem of how the logic of agency—the way common practices are shared, sustained, transformed, passed on, and so forth—could be formulated in a Heideggerian language without vacuuming these moments up into the structure of *das Man*. The problem with this notion is not its pejorative ring, but rather that it makes difficult to explain transformations of common practices without having to resort to an experience of radical transcendence, which, in order to fulfill its function, would have to be made collectively.

answers this question in the affirmative. However, attaining this unity is difficult; it is so, because it cannot be realized through some “schematic thought or belief,” since the “true life” of the individual self has to be taken into account (ibid.). That is to say, the problem of unity is inextricably connected with that of the true self. “Unity,” says Watsuji, “is as difficult as is leading a life true to oneself” (ibid.). The two interconnected problems are, thus: How is true commonality in modern life possible? and How is, under modern conditions, a true, authentic life possible? Watsuji is going to be preoccupied with these problems through the whole of his academic career.<sup>39</sup> In their interconnectedness, these questions are reformulating the fundamental problem of Hegel’s ethical thought. Since his outline of *System der Sittlichkeit* (1802), Hegel was struggling with the problem of how to reconcile the modern demand for individual freedom with the (updated) ancient view that a worthwhile life has to be systematically grounded in ethical (*sittlich*) institutions. It is, therefore, no coincidence that, in *Ethics as the Science of Man* (1934), Watsuji devotes a considerable amount of energy to a minute exegesis of this text.<sup>40</sup>

39. These problems are raised against the backdrop of the influence Western modernity had exerted on Japanese society. Watsuji is well aware of the distinct character of Japanese modernization and the difficulties this entails. In *Resurrection of the Idols* (1917), he writes, “We are facing our destiny to digest the treasures of the whole of mankind and to develop our individuality” (WTZ 17: 273–4). In another text from the same year he states, “However, the Japanese, being hardened by world culture, at last, have come to revive in themselves the Japanese culture of the past. In ourselves, being nurtured by world culture, our tradition too will grow” (WTZ 21: 305). Here, the cultural identity of modern Japan is characterized as some kind of hybridity, which integrates old and new, foreign and domestic. Watsuji discusses this point in *Fūdo*; I will come back to this in the last section.

40. See WTZ 9: 74–109. As we will see later, for Watsuji, the problem in Hegel’s ethical thought is the turn from forms of life in *System der Sittlichkeit* to shapes of spirit in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

At this point, however, we have to note that, prior to dealing with these problems in a philosophical way, Watsuji inquired into the history of ethical thought in Japan. This research materialized in *Ancient Culture of Japan* (1920) and *Studies in the Intellectual History of Japan* (1924). For our purpose, it is particularly noteworthy that Watsuji’s intention was to give an account of concrete ethical life in Japanese history rather than retrieving ethical theories of the past. In his “Notes on the ethical history of Japan” from around 1922, he writes:

More than 20 years after the entry in the “Memorandum,” Watsuji takes up these two problems in a systematic way. In the *Ethics*, he develops a theory of forms of ethical life that, in terms of method, is based on his anti-Cartesianism outlined above.<sup>41</sup> At the core of this theory lies Watsuji's dialectics. The problem that dialectics is meant to solve is the question of how to provide a structural explanation of the I-Thou relation, and how individual and totality (family, society, the state) can be reconciled with each other. Dialectics renders the problems of how ethical institutions must be structured to enable individuals to lead an authentic life and what this entails for their social practices.

One result of Watsuji's analysis of *ningen* as betweenness is that the dual structure of human existence—individuality and sociality—forms a constant tension that can be resolved only temporarily. This tension is constitutive for human agency.<sup>42</sup> Since agency takes place in

---

The need for research on Japanese culture.... To learn to know our ancestors.... No *History of Ethics*; inquiring not only into thought that had been compiled as “science” but also into the opinion of ordinary people. The material for this is, of course, philosophy, [but also] literature, arts, religion, customs, politics, economy and so forth. No history of *Sittenlehre*, but history of *Sitten*. (WTZ Bekkan 1, 369–70).

In the *Ethics*, particularly in the sections on the family, these *sittlich* moments are brought front and center. This approach resonates with that of Hegel, who always stressed the bearing concrete ethical life, the dimension of objective spirit, does have for a philosophical theory of ethics. This is most explicitly stated in the foreword of the *Philosophy of Right*, where he describes philosophy as “its own time comprehended in thought” (PR preface, 21). In other words, political and social philosophy (in Watsuji's terminology: ethics) ought to be normative assessment as well as historically concrete analysis.

41. Hence, one would expect that it makes normative assessments and, at the same time, is historically grounded. Yet, as we will see in a moment, the historical dimension of betweenness does not really translate into the claims Watsuji is actually making. His ambiguity on this point is responsible for some of the most fundamental inconsistencies of his ethical theory.

42. Consider the following:

Sociality and individuality of humanity (人間) mean that human agency is communal and, at the same time, individual. This means that individual acts are not just individual-subjective (個人的主観的), but that they always have a trans-individual foundation, while, at the same time, it means that communal acts are not just trans-individual, but that they are always expressed as acts of the individual. (WTZ 9: 34–5)

ethical relations of betweenness, and since betweenness is the ontological term for the dual character of human existence, agency is to be understood ontologically as a movement between the two aspects of individuality and totality. This is what Watsuji means by the concept of “dual negation.”<sup>43</sup>

For Watsuji, Hegel’s rendering of the ethical relations of love and marriage is paradigmatic inasmuch as it shows that the I can be truly I (in other words, obtain authenticity) only in relation with the other. “According to Hegel,” says Watsuji,

love consists, generally speaking, in the consciousness of “the unity of self and other.” A human being (that is to say, we human beings, insofar as we are, to Hegel, forming relationships of ethical life) is not merely an isolated and independent *I*, even in her natural and direct state. Only by renouncing independence is it possible for the *I* to obtain self-awareness of *I*. In other words, *I* becomes aware of itself as *I* only by knowing that it (*I*) is the unity of the self and other. (W<sub>1</sub>TZ 10: 87–8; R, 82–3; tr. slightly altered)<sup>44</sup>

These remarks reflect Watsuji’s conception of agency; they are consistent with the claim that common practices between individuals involve a mutual understanding of what it means to act (exist) within certain

As we have seen before, from a Heideggerian point of view, this description is insufficient to do justice to what is meant to be the existential (or: ontological) tension between I and Thou. This view cannot be projected on the thematic framework of the *Ethics* without eradicating this very framework. It is precisely for this reason, that Watsuji parted with Heidegger’s existential ontology and took sides with Hegel’s dialectics.

43. Watsuji writes:

Association, in spite of its division into an infinite variety of sorts and degrees, consists in the fact that subjects who were previously separated as the many come back to the one.... Association is “the abandoning of individuality that appears in the form of the abandoning of commonality.” Here dual negation is already implied. (W<sub>1</sub>TZ 10: 121 R, 115; trans. altered)

44. This is a gloss on the following quote from *Philosophy of Right*:

Love means in general the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not isolated on my own [*für mich*] but gain my self-consciousness only through renunciation of my independent existence [*meines Fürsichseins*] and through knowing myself as the union of myself with another and of the other with me.” (PR, §158, A)



institutions that make their agency possible. That is, man and wife have a practical (not a theoretical) knowledge of the institution of marriage, which finds expression and is sustained through their agency. The relation of I and Thou is “ethical unity,” meaning that the “immense contradiction,” consisting in the fact that the I must negate and, at the same time, affirm itself in the other, can be resolved only in an ethical-institutional framework that supports this negation-affirmation (see PR, §158, A). Watsuji utilizes the structure of negation-affirmation as a blueprint for his theory of ethical life-forms in general. This is to say, not only in love and marriage, but also in its relations to society and the state, the individual can obtain authenticity only within the ethical-institutional framework of totality.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to note that Watsuji's reading of Hegel's inquiry into love and marriage ignores one crucial aspect that derives from the “immense contradiction” mentioned above. While what Hegel calls “the first momentum of love,” that is, “that I do not wish to be an independent person in my own right [*für mich*] and that, if I were, I would feel deficient and incomplete” (PR, §158, A), is embraced by Watsuji,<sup>46</sup> the “second momentum of love,” that is the mutual recog-

45. Critics of Hegel (and Watsuji) never tired of pointing at the danger lying in this conception. Since Rousseau and the various forms of state-totalitarianism of the 20th century, we should indeed have learned the lesson that, on the basis of such a conception, the individual is all too easily swallowed up by totality (paradigmatic in this respect is Popper 1945). Even though the criticism against Hegel as the godfather of totalitarianism, by now, has been successfully refuted, exculpating Watsuji is a task still to be done. All the same, facing these problems, one cannot simply take resort to some existential scenario of transcendence (be it fear or death), which would shake off all communal constraints as *uneigentlich* and bring about a liberation of the individual and a new disclosure of the world. Terry Pinkard has proposed an alternative, in this context more useful notion of transcendence. He holds that transcendence means to go beyond one's own subjective point of view in order to be able to recognize the point of view of the other (and vice versa). Transcendence in this sense is nothing we experience accidentally, nothing that comes over us, but rather something that is brought about through social practices (see PINKARD 1994, 57).

46. Watsuji writes:

The first momentum in the union of love, as Hegel also points out, lies in the self and the other abandoning the independence of the ego, but this abandoning is per-

niton between self and other (i.e., “that I find myself in another person, that I gain recognition in this person [*daß ich in ihr gelte*], who in turn gains recognition in me”; *ibid.*), is not discussed at all. Hence, it is not clear how he wants to resolve the “immense contradiction” inherent in the negation-affirmation. For Watsuji, it suffices to point out the momentum of negation implied in the separation of self and other. Hence, while in Hegel, the structure of dual negation means both cancellation and affirmation of the individual aspect, it seems as if in Watsuji, the second moment, affirmation, is vacuumed up into the return to the whole.

To understand the philosophical significance of this move, we have to relate it to Watsuji’s insufficient rendering of the historical dimension inherent in the formation of ethical life-forms. For all the historicity of betweenness, Watsuji’s description of the family lacks historical concreteness. He does acknowledge that “we must refrain from conceiving of the wholeness of the family organistically” (WTZ 10: 95; R, 89), for “the family-community is a mode of existence of humanity, but is not itself something substantial” (*ibid.*; R, 90; trans. altered). In other words, the family, in Watsuji’s account, is supposed to be a dynamic system (and the very notion of dialectics is meant to take this into account). However, Watsuji never discusses what this could mean in terms of historically grounded self-understanding. As a result, he fails to address the questions like “what bearing the profound transformations in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Japanese society did have on the self-understanding within the Japanese family?”<sup>47</sup> Keeping this point in mind is crucial for assessing Watsuji’s

formed on the ground of the separation of self and other. Because of this, in love the fear is that oneself and the other will be separated. (WTZ 10: 121–2; R, 114–15; trans. altered)

47. Watsuji’s ambiguity reflects the struggle to reconcile the modern notion of love and family with the traditional concept of the house (*ie*) since the Meiji-era. In 1872, the Japanese government entrusted the French lawyer Gustave Emile Boissonade de Fontarabie (1825–1910) to draft, amongst others, a modern civil code. As Hirakawa Sukehiro points out, “[a] noteworthy aspect of his draft was the ideal of equality between individu-

rendering of the family in section III on concrete ethical institutions (WTZ 10: 336–444), which presupposes a rational core different from that in Hegel's account.

Now, for Hegel, ethical unity based on this dialectical structure is the supreme condition for actualizing freedom.<sup>48</sup> This specifically modern element of ethical life is emphasized in the independence the marriage partnership has from the larger units of family and the house: "When a marriage takes place," says Hegel, "a new family is constituted, and this is self-sufficient for itself in relation to the kinship groups or houses from which it originated; its links with the latter are based on the natural blood relationship, but the new family is based on ethical love" (PR, §172). With this explanation, Hegel articulates the rational core of modern marriage, consisting in that two individuals

---

als in the inheritance of property" (HIRAKAWA 1989, 474). This ideal met strong opposition from conservatives, most explicitly put forward in Hozomi Yatsuka's essay "Loyalty and filial piety will perish with the enactment of the civil code" (1891). Hozomi's main concern was that if after the death of a household head the property of the house was to be divided equally among the surviving dependents, the house would economically perish. This would also mean that the place for worshipping the ancestors would be inevitably lost. In the end:

Boissonnade's provisions were rejected and replaced by requirements that the household head inherit all property. In sum, the Meiji government placed more emphasis on maintaining the "house" (*ie*) as a structural unit than on respecting the individual's right to inheritance. (HIRAKAWA 1989, 474)

On the other hand, in the general provisions on property rights, the civil code was "based on the spirit of individualism":

According to Western historical concepts, Japan's civil code was thus based on a dual structure, whose two layers were logically inconsistent: the return of the individual to a *gemeinschaft*-type of "house" unit in personal relationships versus the recognition of that person's status as an individual in capitalistic society. (HIRAKAWA 1989, 476)

The philosophical challenge arising from such contradictions is to give an account of the inner logic of hybrid modernities. The purpose of such an account would consist in deconstructing the notion of modernity as *singulare tantum*.

48. See PR §153: "The right of individuals to their subjective determination to freedom is fulfilled in so far as they belong to ethical actuality." Cf. WTZ 10: 28: "Trust and truth and freedom and justice appear here [i.e., in the structure of solidarity, understood as particular forms in which the law of human existence has become concrete] in their special form and by name" (R, 24–5; trans. altered).

freely choose each other based on the love they feel for each other, not because the clan or house wants them to be married.

Despite his enthusiastic approval of Hegel's insight into the dialectical structure of the I-Thou relation, Watsuji cannot agree with this part in Hegel. When he blames Hegel for not taking into account the ethical meaning the family relations do have beyond the relation between husband and wife for the institutions of marriage and family, he brings into play his own cultural presuppositions.

The unity with the house," he says with reference to Hegel, "is based on natural blood-relations, whereas a new family is based on ethical (*sittlich*) love.... The three forms of association [husband and wife, blood relations, siblings] we inquired into, is here reduced to only the one association of man and woman. Something like the ethical meaning existing in the stages of relations between the three associations is not taken into account at all. (WTZ 10: 416)

This is to say, the ethical relation of the family must not be reduced to that of husband and wife, but has to be extended to blood relations, the relation of siblings, and, finally, the house itself. Hence, Watsuji concludes:

When seen in this way, the ethical significance of the family lies in the fact that the associations of husband and wife, parents and children and siblings each actualizes itself in accordance with the actuality of the house. Here, the way of husband and wife and the way of parents and children have to be actualized in accordance to the actuality of the association that shares everyday life. (WTZ 10: 431)

The ethical character of these relations is actualized within the reality of the house. The rational core of this form of ethical life is the maintenance of the house, since without the house no actualization of ethical family relations is possible.

From the viewpoint of a (outdated) textbook version of Hegelian teleology (which, as we will see in the next section, is very close to Watsuji's understanding), Watsuji's account lacks self-consciousness of

spirit. In the form of ethical life Watsuji describes, spirit, so it seems, has not yet come to itself. Hence, one could argue, Watsuji has given an account of a typical Japanese ethical life-form, which is, from the world-historical perspective of absolute spirit, just a pre-stage of the ethical unity of marriage in European societies, where the spirit has been fully actualized.<sup>49</sup> However, this criticism misses the point. What is important in Watsuji's account of the family is that it shows the difficulties inherent in his anti-Cartesian position. As the discussion in this section should have made clear, Watsuji's anti-Cartesianism involves the problem of how to explain the continuation and transformation of common practices without relying on a model of representation that would allow a reduction of such continuations and transformations to some grounds within the individual mind. Since Watsuji discusses these questions within the context of modernity, he also cannot appeal to some form of traditionalism, according to which common practices are passed on just because that is the way "we" got used to living our lives. Since sustaining practices involves inter-subjective acts of understanding and formation, this problem, when we properly think it through, has in itself a historical dimension pointing beyond traditionalism. Therefore, the observation that Watsuji did not sufficiently consider the historicity of common practices begs for an explanation beyond *Ideologiekritik*. All the same, Watsuji himself must have felt the need for providing a philosophical foundation that could account for both the dialectics of the I-Thou relation and the structure of common agency. He develops his explanation, again, in a critical appropriation of Hegelian insights, particularly the notion of objective spirit, which he interprets in terms of spatiality. As we will see in the following section, this resort to spatiality does not solve the problem of historic-

49. Of course, Watsuji would not agree with this criticism. In *Fūdo*, he rejects its very foundation, that it is a Eurocentric conception of world history (see WTZ 8: 232). In his ethical writings, he deals with Hegel's notion of spirit to refute this teleological claim in a different way. This will become clear in the following section.

ity, but it helps to better appreciate the wider implications of Watsuji's anti-Cartesianism.

#### TRANSFORMATIONS

In a handwritten note in his copy of *Philosophy of Right*, Watsuji laments the loss of life in Hegel's dialectic: "Hegel throws away the life of dialectic and turns to putting it into a scheme; here is the point of what is called having lapsed into teleology/purposiveness. That means the eternalizing of and making absolute the empirical and relative!"<sup>50</sup> The passage, he is referring to here, reads: "For what matters is to recognize in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance, which is immanent and the eternal which is present." (PR, Introduction, 20) Watsuji's note aptly captures his main concern with Hegel. As we have seen above, he misses in Hegel the acknowledgment of cultural difference in forms of ethical life. When he says that Hegel is putting dialectics into a scheme (*schematisieren*), he means that Hegel disregards the irreducible diversity of culturally and historically discrete forms of ethical life in favor of a Eurocentric teleology of history.

In his critique, Watsuji follows Marx while maintaining that "Hegel's science of ethical life (人倫の学) can be called one of the greatest paradigms for the science of the ethical (*rinrigaku*, 倫理学)" (WTZ 9: 108). Watsuji maintains this position with respect to *System der Sittlichkeit* (1802). Similar to Marx, he claims that, from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* onwards, Hegel had sacrificed the concreteness of ethical life to the process of its comprehension in thought, which culminates in the self-knowing of absolute spirit. And so, the quote goes on:

50. 「Hegel が Dialektik の生命をすてて schematisieren に。合目的性に墮したと云はるる点ここにあり。即ち経ケンの相対的なるものの永遠化絶対化!」 See p. 14 in Watsuji's copy of the PR edited by Lasson (Leipzig: Meiner, 3rd edition, 1930); 法政大学図書館、和辻哲郎文庫 134/35/6/和。

But Hegel, while having achieved such a science of ethical life, melts it into the philosophy of spirit and puts his efforts into understanding the stages of ethical reality solely in terms of development of the idea and progress of the concept. Insofar as spirit tries to grasp its own content, this treatment has to be regarded as natural. Viewed from this angle, it seems as if Hegel wanted to let depart the whole of human existence from thinking. (WTZ 9: 108–9)

This is meant to say that Hegel lost touch with the plurality of objectifications of spirit (expressions, in Watsuji's terminology), because he understood spirit solely in terms of thinking (思惟). That is, Hegel had failed to understand spirit in terms of spatio-temporal subjectivity, and therefore, lapsed into teleology of absolute spirit, the dialectical development of which leads to a schematic grasp of spirit's objectifications. To be sure, Watsuji does not give away his insight into how the concrete reality of ethical life-forms is formed, preserved, passed on, and so forth. He, thus, sticks to Hegel's notion of a dialectical development of spirit, but only in a form where it is purified of its teleological implications.<sup>51</sup> This move resembles the attempts in the critical theory of the Frankfurt school to separate Hegel's practical philosophy from his theoretical philosophy, which, in turn, had been informed by the criticism of Marx.<sup>52</sup>

We can doubt whether or not this understanding of Hegel as a mentalist/cognitivist interpretation, which rests on a specific reading of the science of spirit as *Geistmetaphysik* (to borrow Axel Honneth's phrase), is appropriate. Recent scholarship has opened up alternative perspectives on how the concept of spirit can be understood more adequately. Among these, some have made an attempt to understand

51. From this and his remark with reference to *Being and Time* §82b, where Heidegger had accused Hegel for having completed the Cartesian experiment in that he had given a logical form to the *ego cogito* (cf. WTZ 10: 243–4), we can conclude that Watsuji's criticism aims at some unresolved Cartesianism in Hegel (as was the aim of his criticism of Heidegger). As we will see in a moment, Watsuji's criticism of Hegel is based on a problematic assumption.

52. Axel Honneth too is indebted to this genealogy; see HONNETH 2011.

spirit as activity<sup>53</sup> or relation,<sup>54</sup> thus connecting it with various problems in practical philosophy. This path in the study of Hegel certainly generated many followers. As Charles Taylor points out, self-consciousness of spirit takes place “not only in concepts and symbols, but also in common institutions and practices.”<sup>55</sup> Obviously, this reading is more in line with Watsuji’s own ideas than is the mentalist worldview that he falsely attributes to Hegel. However, the aim of his criticism goes further: “From Hegel’s own point of view,” says Watsuji, “in [the discussion of] spirit as ‘the developing true reality of *Idee*,’ that is, spirit as ‘subject,’ subjective spatiality and temporality should have been problematized” (WTZ 10: 242; R, 230; trans. altered). The point is well made. It is not convincing that Hegel discusses spatiality and temporality only in one branch of his *Realphilosophie*, that is the philosophy of nature (and there only very briefly). As Anton-Friedrich Koch points out,<sup>56</sup> one desideratum of Hegel’s philosophy lies in the application of these notions to the other branch of *Realphilosophie*, that is the philosophy of spirit.

For Watsuji, fulfilling this desideratum means providing the philosophical means to acknowledge a plurality of developments of spirit, that is an irreducible cultural diversity of forms of ethical life. Since, in his view, Hegel understood spirit solely as thinking, it lacks spatial concreteness, which, in turn, is responsible for separating the ethical relation of marriage from the natural relation of the house. However, as marriage and family are relations that have to be understood as dialectical expressions of spirit, the reformulation of spirit in terms

53. In this regard, Hegel says:

It is of the very nature of spirit to be this absolute liveliness, this process, to proceed forth from naturality, immediacy, to quit its naturality, and to come to itself, and to free itself, it being itself only as it comes to itself as such a product of itself; its actually being merely what is has made itself into what it is.... It is only as a result of itself that it is spirit. (PHSS, I: 16–17)

54. PINKARD 1994, 9.

55. TAYLOR 1985, 87.

56. KOCH 2010.



of spatiality leads to a transformation of dialectics, which threatens Watsuji's whole project in the sense that it undermines his anti-Cartesian insights. As noted previously, at the very center of these insights lies the notion that forms of ethical life are established, preserved, passed on, and transformed through common practices which require a shared understanding of the normative horizon, the horizon where these practices and life-forms can be experienced as something significant and meaningful. The ethical life-forms, normative horizons, and common practices are, in this sense, not given, but formed. This is Watsuji's strongest argument against any Cartesian (or naturalistic) approach to ethical problems. Moreover, this point makes it clear why he remains close to Hegel's notion of spirit. Since Watsuji's expressivist conception of agency makes sense only if supported by some notion of mindedness, and since this mindedness, like in Hegel, must not be misinterpreted as individual processing but has to be understood as common, inter-subjective and reflexive understanding, for Watsuji, a modified Hegelian solution must have immediately suggested itself.

However, by applying the concept of spatiality to Hegel's notion of spirit, the dynamism inherent in this view of agency is brought to a standstill. This occurs, because Watsuji equates the absolute indifference and continuity of space in Hegel (see E, §254) with "the being side by side of subjects; that is, the mutual externality of subjects." And he goes on:

Moreover, because it does not involve any determinate discrimination insofar as it is direct and abstractive, then space is straightforwardly continuous; that is directly self-other-not-two (*jita funi* 自他不二). This subjective externality, which is at once discriminatory and nondiscriminatory, is simply equivalent to our so-called spatiality of *ningen*. (WTZ 10: 242–3; R, 231; tr. slightly altered)

Obviously, this move is meant to reveal an ontological foundation for the emergence of ethical life-forms, normative horizons, and common practices. In the sense that the spatial continuity between subjects

is prior to any distinction and negation, it is purely logical continuity. This is inconsistent with the notion of formation (形成), as this notion does not and cannot presuppose an indeterminate externality in terms of *jita funi*. In fact, there is no transition from logical spatiality to historically shaped normative horizons that could explain how certain practices at certain times are understood as normatively binding, whereas at other times, they are not. In short, spatiality cannot account for the historicity of norms. Viewed from another angle, projecting his own notion of spatiality to Hegel's concept of space leads Watsuji to a definition of subjectivity that is problematic insofar as it cannot explain negation in the sphere of common agency without positing a totality prior to any dialectical differentiation and determination. With this reductionist move, Watsuji undermines his anti-Cartesian insights and shifts to a position that, similar to Heidegger, takes resort in an ontological facticity. The only difference between them is that Heidegger resorts to the phenomenon of temporality while Watsuji puts his hopes on spatiality. Moreover, we cannot see how Watsuji's reductionist move could provide the means to philosophically justify an irreducible diversity of culturally discrete forms of ethical life, which was, as noted above, the motivational force behind this move in the first place.

Watsuji's attempt in the *Ethics* to spatialize spirit is meant to take into account both cultural particularities and dialectical development of spirit (i.e., objectifications of common understanding and the correlating normative horizons), thus bearing witness to the immense difficulties inherent in such an enterprise. Drawing both from Hegel and Heidegger further amplifies these difficulties. While Watsuji's notion of agency is clearly Hegelian, the influence of Heidegger behind his emphasis on spatiality is obvious. Watsuji's assertion of an immediacy of totality (the betweenness of self-other-not-two in terms of pure spatiality) prior to any constitutive act contradicts the Hegelian elements in his thought. In *Fūdo*, Watsuji develops this problem in a different and more promising direction. There, cultural particularities

and development of spirit are rendered in a more balanced fashion. I do not have the space here to develop this in detail; hence I confine myself to some preliminary, unsupported assumptions that might reveal a number of possibilities and, more importantly, open questions in Watsuji.

#### ASSUMPTIONS, POSSIBILITIES, OPEN QUESTIONS

Hegel's account of spirit in the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia* can be read as a narrative of how people in modern Western societies have come to understand themselves in terms of asking for and giving reasons to authorize their common practices. In this respect, Hegel notes, "essentially, spirit is only what it knows itself to be." (PM, §385) In other words, people in modern Western societies are living in a shared social space that is animated by what Taylor calls "modern social imaginaries." A social imaginary functions as a background understanding that informs "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."<sup>57</sup> Put differently, a social imaginary makes it possible for people to move around in a shared social space without losing their orientation; it makes it possible for them to make sense of their common practices and their normative implications. In modern Western societies, it makes it possible for them to understand themselves as mutually recognized members who are, qua mindful agency, constitutive of and responsible for this society, its norms, and practices.<sup>58</sup>

57. TAYLOR 2004, 23

58. We should note that the conception of "social imaginary" is Taylor's latest effort to give an alternative account of modernity that is contrasted with both the "boosters" and the "knockers" of the modern project (see TAYLOR 1991). However, whereas in his earlier works, he focused solely on Western modernity and its ramifications, he now opens a perspective that accommodates the possibility of multiple, culturally distinct trajectories of how the characteristic modern self-understanding of humanity has developed. Hence,

The crucial point of Hegel's narrative of spirit is that it is confined to the experience spirit has had with itself in the West. "The 'we' of the *Phenomenology*," says Terry Pinkard, "is only the 'we' of modern European culture."<sup>59</sup> The problem that arises from this limitation, and which is tacitly motivating Watsuji's reading of Hegel is, in Pinkard's words, "Can the 'we' of this type of reflection be rationally extended to all of humanity?"<sup>60</sup> That is, can we, for example, take it for granted that in every modern society the same practices of recognition are at work? Can we presuppose that the notion of recognition as such can, without qualifications, be applied to non-Western societies? Can we speak, in a philosophical sense, of modernity in the case of Japan, or of any other non-Western society?

As the discussion in the prior section suggests, it would not violate Watsuji's intentions to apply his notions of agency, self-understanding, and commonality to the concept of social imaginary and, thus, employ them for an alternative rendering of the modernity-problem. In investigating the particular Japanese aspects of modernity, he provides possibilities to develop the more general question for the "type of reflection" that people in other cultures and societies employ for making their way within their social space, for justifying their common practices and the normative demands inherent in them, and for understanding themselves within their social imaginary.

These questions Watsuji addresses in his theory of climate. In a preliminary study to *Fūdo* called "Investigation into National Character" (1929), he suggests complementing the historical understanding of singularities and particularities by taking into account their spatial setting.<sup>61</sup> This is further developed in *Fūdo*. In this text, to spatialize

in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, he introduces the concept of "multiple modernities" (TAYLOR 2004, I, 195).

59. PINKARD 1994, 334.

60. PINKARD 1994, 335.

61. Watsuji writes:

However, the problem is whether the historically particular, singular can be suffi-

spirit means, firstly, to acknowledge the embodiment of common practices. As being expressions of spirit, common practices are, as Watsuji puts it, “the movement in which various associations and communities are shaped,” while this “subjective practice (主体的実践)... does not arise apart from subjective body (主体的な身体)” (WTZ 8: 15). Watsuji's intuition is that, to give an account of culturally distinct practices and normative horizons, one has to understand not only the historical trajectory of norms, ideas, institutions, and so forth, but also the spaces they occupy.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the significance that social spaces of agency have for coming to grips with distinct forms of ethical life (that is, social imaginaries) can be fully understood only within a broader concept of space he calls climate (*fūdo* 風土). Being a concretion of existential spatiality, climate is “a way of self-understanding of man (人間の自己了解の仕方)” (WTZ 8: 13). Since self-understanding is always inter-subjective and practical and since practices, understood as shared

ciently understood as *nur einmalig*. When one determines history as *nur einmalig*, then the above mentioned particularities are not only historical determinations take on not only a historical determination but also another powerful determination that has to be called *einortlich*. (WTZ Bekkan 1, 378)

62. What is involved here can be studied, again, in Watsuji's examination of the family. In *Fūdo*, he develops an account of the family/house in terms of *hedate-naki aidagara*, that is “non-separated betweenness” (WTZ 8: 144). This is to be understood in a dual sense, spatially and normatively. The spatial aspect finds expression in the traditional architecture of the Japanese house, where the individual rooms are not strictly separated from each other, but is not necessarily bound up with it (see WTZ 8: 166–7, where Watsuji claims that the Japanese life-form of the house is sustained even in the most advanced Western architecture). The normative aspect is connected with the historical dimension of the house and the ethical demands this entails. Thus, when Watsuji notes that, due to its historicity, the whole of the house “precedes” its individual members (WTZ 8: 142) this does not imply a reversal of the quote given above (according to which neither the whole nor the individual has precedence). After all, this is not an ontological claim (unlike that one above), but rather a characterization of a specific Japanese self-understanding that is not based on the “awakening of the individual” (WTZ 8: 143). From Watsuji's inquiry we can conclude that, in the Japanese house, the members gain their status of recognition by fulfilling certain roles (husband, wife, father, mother, and so forth) within this form of ethical life, which roles are more or less fixed. Like in the *Ethics*, the question of how to explain philosophically profound historical changes (associated, for instance, with granting children's rights or gender issues) within this form of ethical life is left unaddressed.

common practices, are expressions of spirit, what Watsuji calls the climatic “way of self-understanding,” is necessarily a reflection of spirit that involves a climatic moment. Hence, in *Fūdo*, to spatialize spirit means, secondly, to understand the development of spirit not only in terms of history, but also in terms of climate: “history is climatic history, and climate is historical climate” (WTZ 8: 16). In other words: “man is generally not just carrying a ‘past,’ but a particular ‘climatic past’” (ibid.). The historical development of spirit finds expression in particular “forms”—“forms of housing” (WTZ 8: 12), “forms of clothing” (WTZ 8: 13), “forms of food” (WTZ 8: 13), “gestures, language, movements, works, social institutions” (WTZ 9: 144), “customs, and forms of life” (WTZ 10: 38)—which come into being not without some understanding of their spatial-climatic background. Accordingly, Watsuji claims, “we can detect the phenomenon of climate in all of the expressions of human life, in literature, arts, religion, customs, and so forth” (WTZ 8: 13).<sup>63</sup>

We must, therefore, grasp objectifications of spirit not just as temporal/historical, but also as spatio-climatic forms of ethical life. In contrast, Hegel emphasizes only the former moment, while ignoring the latter. In this sense, Watsuji says: “In the *Encyclopedia*, the phenomenology of spirit should have taken on a climatic coloring” (WTZ 8: 230). Forms of ethical life make demands on their members not only because of the historically shared normative horizons, but also because these forms come into being within some climatic context to which human beings have to respond. Forms of ethical life are formed not only within the relational structure of betweenness, but also within the relational structure of climaticity (風土性). This is to say that, in Watsuji’s climatology, nature becomes a part of the background that makes common practices realizable. In other words, nature, under-

63. It is against this historic-climatological backdrop, that Watsuji claims: “Hegel’s notion of ‘spirit’ is something subjective (主体的) that becomes conscious of itself as idea and together with that objectifies itself as nature and furthermore, while it realizes itself in nature, goes on to form culture.” (WTZ 8: 228)

stood as climate, takes on the status of a normative source, which nevertheless, as the quote above reveals, is not something given, but has to be expressed through human agency.<sup>64</sup> Thus, in *Fūdo*, Watsuji avoids the pitfall of hypostasizing a substance prior to any constitutive act. Climate does not have a foundational function. Also, it is neither disenchanting nature nor the product of some re-enchantment, but part of humanity's expressive practices. The hermeneutical approach Watsuji provides is meant to enable us to make sense of particular forms of ethical life through giving accounts in which their spatio-climatic moments are taken into consideration. In this regard, the following quote is illuminating.

When man becomes conscious of the root of his existence and expresses this consciousness in an objective fashion, the way of how this finds expression is restricted not only by history but also by climate. There is yet to be a self-consciousness of spirit that was not thus restricted.... If climatic conditioning has affected every part of mankind and has given to each part its own peculiar merits, it is just from this that we can be made conscious of our own weakness and learn from another. This is again the means by which climatic limitation can be surmounted. Neglect of nature does not mean to surmount nature. This is merely lack of awareness within climatic limitation. However, climatic distinctions do not disappear as a result of the surmounting of limitations

64. In *Fūdo*, Watsuji did not succeed with his attempt to develop a notion of climate in relation with his expressivist theory of agency. Instead, in his descriptions of different types of climate, he lapsed into geographical determinism, which is totally against his intentions developed in the first chapter of the book. Evidently, Watsuji did not want to establish causal claims, in which climate functions as efficient causation and forms of ethical life as its result. In fact, he never tired to stress that climate in this sense must be distinguished from nature as dealt with in the natural sciences and, thus, requires a specific methodology:

To understand historico-climatic phenomena, we need to have strict ontological guidance. Accordingly we have, amongst others, to obey that these phenomena are expressions of man's self-conscious existence, that climate is a moment of the self-objectification and self-disclosure of this existence, and hence, that types of climate understood as types of subjective human existence can be obtained only through the interpretation of climatic-historical phenomena. (WTZ 8: 22)

through awareness of them. The opposite is the case, for it is precisely by this recognition that their distinctiveness is created. (WTZ 8: 119–20; CC, 117–8; trans. altered)

Climate not only can, but also in modern times must, fuse with other climates. Watsuji had clearly grasped that the encounter with Western modernity forces non-Western cultures to change and to adapt. However, according to him, this cannot happen by abandoning one's own cultural roots, but rather by some fusion of horizons, that leads to a heightened awareness of one's climatic limitations. If we hold Watsuji's standpoint that climate "belongs to human existence [and] therefore, the natural environment does not stand in opposition to the various species of mankind but is nothing else than their ontic contents" (WTZ 11: 152), then we can also say that climate is an expression of human existence in a specific place and at a specific time. This means that the notion of *fūdo* contains self-understanding and thus is in part giving expression to a particular social imaginary.

What could it mean, then, that climate (in part) accounts for the distinct character of Japanese (or any other) modernity? How are we to interpret the claim that not only reception and appropriation of Western values, norms, institutions, and practices, but also the coming to being of Western modernity itself ought to be understood in their relation to climate? Could we, for instance, by taking into account the concept of climate, provide a narrative that makes sense of the late modern Japanese family structure, or of the peculiarities of the public sphere in current Japan? As shown above, Watsuji tries to make sense of the notion of family by referring to the architecture of the house, which he bestows with some normative force. To be sure, in terms of historical and anthropological knowledge, such an account would be promising. It could also help us flesh out the philosophical conception of multiple modernities proposed by Charles Taylor. Whereas Taylor had confined his investigation to the societies of the West, Watsuji's account could serve as an example of how modern Western institu-



tions and forms of self-understanding have fused with particular Japanese forms of ethical life and the corresponding senses of self.

However, the question remains whether such an account would generate any new philosophical knowledge, that is, whether it could decisively enhance the notion of multiple modernities and the underlying concept of agency. Even if this question were to be answered in the negative (and I think it has to), Watsuji's anti-Cartesianism is still illuminating inasmuch as it shows (a) that such a position not necessarily goes together with anti-modernism, but could be associated with the notion of multiple modernities, and (b) that any anti-Cartesian position that aims at a non-mentalist and non-individualist explanation of how common practices and their normative horizons are sustained and transformed, is fraught with the difficulty of giving an historical account of how, on which rational grounds, these practices and horizons have come into being. Obviously, the viability of (a) depends on whether or not such an account is possible.

\* This paper is based on a talk I gave at the International Conference "Views of Watsuji Tetsurō from around the World" at Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Nanzan University, Nagoya, 25–26 June 2016. I wish to thank the organizers and all participants for having made possible this most stimulating event. I would also like to thank Philip Cerda for checking my English.

## REFERENCES

### *Abbreviations*

- CC Watsuji Tetsurō, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, translated by Geoffrey Bownas (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Japan; Yūshūdō, 1961). Cited by page number.
- E G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. In *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), vol. 9. Cited by paragraph (§) number.
- PM G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, translated from the 1830 Edition, together with the *Zusätze* by William Wallace and A.V. Miller, with Revisions and Commentary by M. J. Inwood, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). Cited by paragraph (§) number.

- PR G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen W. Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Cited by paragraph (§) number. Remarks are indicated by an “R,” Additions by an “A.”
- PHSS G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, trans. M. Petry (Berlin: Springer, 1977). Cited by paragraph (§) number.
- R *Watsuji Tetsurō’s Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan. Watsuji Tetsurō*. Translated by Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). Cited by page number.
- WTZ 『和辻哲郎全集』 [Complete works of Watsuji Tetsurō] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2nd edition, 1991). Cited by volume and page number.

### Other Sources

BELLAH, Robert N.

- 1965 “Japan’s Cultural Identity. Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsurō,” in Robert N. Bellah, *Imagining Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 114–39.

BERQUE, Augustin

- 1982 *Vivre l’espace au Japon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France).
- 2000A *Écoumène. Introduction à l’étude des milieux humains* (Paris: Belin).
- 2000B *Médiance. De milieux en paysages* (Paris: Belin).

BUCHHEIM, Thomas, ed.

- 1989 *Dekonstruktion und Übersetzung: Zu den Aufgaben von Philosophiegeschichte nach Martin Heidegger* (Weinheim: VCH Acta Humaniora).

BUCHNER, Hartmut, ed.

- 1989 *Japan und Heidegger*. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke).

CALICHMAN, Richard

- 2008 *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press).

DALE, Peter N.

- 1990 *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (Oxford: The Nissan Institute).

DAVIS, Bret

- 2003 「退歩と邂逅：西洋哲学から思索の対話へ」 [Regression and encounter: From Western philosophy to a dialogue of thought], 『日本哲学史研究』 1: 36–66.

DORSEY, James

- 2009 *Critical Aesthetics: Kobayashi Hideo, Modernity, and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

EISENSTADT, S. N.

2000 "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129/1: 1–29.

FIGAL, Günter

1992 *Heidegger zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius).

GOTO-JONES, Chris, ed.

2007 *Re-politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy* (London: Routledge).

HAROOTUNIAN, Harry D.

2001 *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

HEIDEGGER, Martin

1954 *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske).

HEISIG, James W. and John C. MARALDO, eds.)

1994 *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press).

HIRAKAWA Sukehiro

1989 "Japan's Turn to the West," in Marius B. Jansen, ed. *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 5, The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 432–98.

HONNETH, Axel

2011 *Das Recht der Freiheit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp).

KOCH, Anton-Friedrich

2010 "Hegelsche Subjekte in Raum und Zeit," *Hegel-Jahrbuch* (2010): 63–71.

KOYASU Nobukuni 子安宣邦

2010 『和辻倫理学を読む：もう一つの「近代の超克」』 [Reading Watsuji's ethics: Another "overcoming of modernity"] (Tokyo: Seidosha).

KUMANO Sumihiko 熊野純彦

2009 『和辻哲郎：文化哲学者の軌跡』 [Watsuji Tetsurō: Tracing a philosopher of culture] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten).

KAWAKAMI Tetsutarō 河上徹太郎 and TAKEUCHI Yoshimi 竹内三好

1979 『近代の超克』 [Overcoming modernity] (Tokyo: Fusanbō).

KRUMMEL, John W. M.

2015 *Nishida Kitarō's Chiasmatic Chorology: Place of Dialectic, Dialectic of Place* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press).

LARMORE, Charles

1996 *The Morals of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

LIEDERBACH, Hans Peter

- 2001 *Martin Heidegger im Denken Watsuji Tetsurōs: Ein japanischer Beitrag zur Philosophie der Lebenswelt* (München: Iudicium).  
 2016 (ed.) *Philosophie im gegenwärtigen Japan* (München: Iudicium), in press.

MAY, Reinhard

- 1989 *Ex Oriente Lux: Heideggers Werk und ostasiatischem Einfluss* (Wiesbaden: Steiner).

MINE Hideki 嶺秀樹

- 1991 『存在と無のはざままで: ハイデッガーと形而上学』 [Between being and nothingness: Heidegger and metaphysics] (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō).  
 2002 『ハイデッガーと日本の哲学』 [Heidegger and Japanese philosophy] (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō).

NATSUME Sōseki 夏目漱石

- 1911 「現代日本の開花」 [The Enlightenment of modern Japan], in 『私の個人主義』 [My individualism] (Tokyo: Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1978).

PARKES, Graham

- 1996 “Rising Sun over the Black Forest,” In Reinhart May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on his Work*, trans. by G. Parkes (London: Routledge).

PINKARD, Terry

- 1994 *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).  
 2003 “Taylor, ‘History,’ and the History of Philosophy,” in Ruth Abbey, ed., *Charles Taylor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 187–213.

PIPPIN, Robert B.

- 1991 *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).  
 1997 *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).  
 2014 “Reconstructivism: On Honneth's Hegelianism,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (2014): 1–17.

POPPER, Karl R.

- 1945 *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge).

TAYLOR, Charles

- 1975 *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).  
 1985 “Hegel's Philosophy of Mind,” in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).  
 1989 *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

1991 *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

2004 *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press).

UEDA Shizuteru 上田閑照

2011 "Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School," in Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth, eds., *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Dialogue with the Kyoto School* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press), 19–32.

WEINMAYR, Elmar

1992 *Entstellung: Die Metaphysik im Denken Martin Heideggers. Mit einem Blick nach Japan* (München: Fink).

YUASA Yasuo 湯浅泰雄

1981 『和辻哲郎：日本哲学の運命』 [Watsuji Tetsurō: The fate of Japanese philosophy] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō).