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Watsuji Tetsuro's Ontological Ethics as a Conceptual Framework for Environmental Philosophy

Albert E. Pike

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**WATSUJI TETSURŌ'S ONTOLOGICAL ETHICS AS A CONCEPTUAL
FRAMEWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

BY

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B.A., SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

ST. MARY'S CITY, MARYLAND, 2004

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF ASIAN STUDIES AT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY**

SOUTH ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

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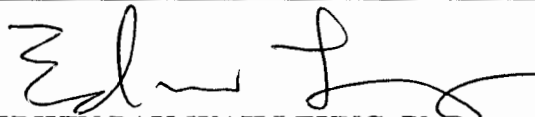
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ABSTRACT

Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960) has developed a system of philosophy that is founded upon an interrelation between ontology and ethics. His ontology is notable in its demonstration of the phenomenological connection between the development of human culture and the spatial/environmental settings from which these cultures emerge. Watsuji's ethical system attempts to redress what he feels is the isolation and destructive egoity generated by the Western conception of individuality. He describes ethics in terms of the in-betweenness that exists unites individuals, their environments, and social interconnections. For Watsuji, the dialectic between individuals and society in which ethics are produced is the core definitional act in being human. Even though Watsuji developed his system in the social context of Japan nearing the closure of the Taishō and throughout the Shōwa periods, Watsuji's ontological ethics have further and universal implications. Watsuji's ethics can be practically applied to the field of environmental philosophy. His system's emphasis on the interpenetration of human action and environmental space as well as the degree to which his ethics stress connectivity and breaching the perceptual barriers of the ego make it well suited for such a study. This paper seeks to demonstrate how Watsuji's notions of climate and interrelationality can be synthesized to create an environmental philosophy. A philosophy that will include ecological space in the dynamic of ethics based on the modern Japanese philosophical understanding of the Buddhist idea of double negation. To ground the potential for an environmental ethic based on Watsuji's philosophy a comparison is made between the ecological insights that can be interpreted from Watsuji's *Fūdo* and *Rinrigaku* and Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic as outlined in *Sand County Almanac*.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Issues over environmental protection and policy often stem from a question of value. What aspects of the environment are worth conserving? Why are they worth conserving? To what extent should the economy compromise development in the interests of such environmental efforts? Who is ultimately responsible for these problems? Often these inquiries are sparked by incidents in which humanity's poor treatment of and harmony with its environment becomes readily apparent. There are many symptoms of poor environmental health: deforestation, species extinction, habitat destruction, proliferation of introduced species, air quality, and water quality. Sometimes these symptoms can be seen in humans as well. Take for example the host of conditions that appeared in the Japanese population during the 1960s and 1970s as a result of industrial emissions. They include Minamata disease,¹ a form of mercury poisoning, Yokkaichi Asthma,² and *Itai, Itai* disease.³ Both types of occurrences are the catalyst for cries on

¹ In 1968, Minamata disease was recognized as a condition caused by ingestion of mercury contaminated fish and shellfish from Minamata Bay. Chisso Corp., a nearby Tokyo based synthetic resin manufacturer, had been disposing a mercury byproduct of its production process into the waters of Minamata Bay. As a result people began to suffer from paralysis of the nervous system as well as various birth defects. Over 900 deaths were caused by the condition and thousands were permanently disabled or suffered from a host of neurological disorders. In 2004, the Osaka High Court determined that Chisso Corp.'s actions regarding disposal of its wastewater were negligent according to wastewater disposal standards as of 1959 and environmental protection policies current as of 1960. As a result of this ruling both Chisso Corp. and the prefectural government were held responsible and were ordered to pay indemnities to victims' families. Justin McCurry, "Japan Remembers Minamata," *Lancet* 9505 (January 2006): 99-100.

² Beginning in 1953, citizens of Yokkaichi began to complain of respiratory ailments; later it was determined that these conditions were bronchial asthma caused by sulfur

the part of the general population, academic community, government agencies, and concerned NGOs for action and legislation.

The cases listed for Japan underscore an aspect of this debate that requires careful study. Unfortunately for the victims, awareness of the extent of the interrelatedness of human beings and the natural environment is only prevalent when there is a change in the quality of human life. This interconnectivity between human beings and their environment is a constant; the relationship exists at all times regardless of the consciousness of those involved of the relationship's presence. The imminence of this relationship is precisely the reason that sound environmental ethics are important. For, the potential of human action to impact the quality of this relationship and thus the quality of human life is staggering. The ethical and ontological philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurō (1889 – 1960), with its emphasis on non-duality, climate, and interrelatedness, is particularly well suited to the development of an environmental ethic.

Watsuji's philosophy has the potential to redress the conflict in environmental ethics between the assignment of value to the environment and the paradoxical nature of the relationship between humanity and the natural world. Ethics regarding the environment as an object to be preserved for either aesthetic purposes or for reasons of

oxide emissions from nearby oil refineries. The impact of the Yokkaichi Kombinato industrial complexes ranged from health complications, a sharp decline in air quality, to damaging the local Yokkaichi fishing industry. Court cases involving the companies who built the industrial complexes led to the first successful settlement in favor of plaintiffs suing a *kombinato* over damage caused to local populations and environment due to industrial emissions. As a result, other *kombinato* could be sued by afflicted individuals and the Japanese government enacted antipollution law in 1967. N. Huddle and M. Reich, *Island of Dreams: Environmental Crisis in Japan* (Tokyo: Autumn, 1975).

³ F.G. Notehelfer, "Japan's First Pollution Incident," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 2 (Spring 1975), 351.

continued sustenance both suffer from making a metaphysical distinction between humanity and its environment. When evaluated for the purposes of either protection or exploitation “the environment” becomes cut off from humanity and ceases to be a unified system of which humanity is a component part. In the case of preserving “nature” or “the environment” for its inherent value, whether that value is founded in aesthetics or with the view that humans, as responsible living beings, should shepherd it, what is being cared for is objectified and made distinct from the human preserver. According to the aesthetic or conservationist view, nature is doing well when it is apprehended as unblemished, pure, varied and vibrant but these adjectives all describe a condition in which nature is untouched by human hands.⁴ Thus, the environment is healthy when humans can experience it without experiencing human impact. However, the relationship between humanity and the environment using metaphysics influenced by ecology shows that “nature” is an all-encompassing expansive system in which human beings like all species, despite the breadth of their impact, fill a niche.

Insights made in the 1960s concerning growing environmental problems had led ecologists and ethicists alike to look to the viewpoints of cultures other than the West to approach these issues. Two main contributing factors for the degradation of environmental conditions in the West have been identified by those thinkers looking for a cross-cultural approach. One is that the treatment of the environment by Western civilization may be due in part to underlying historical, religious, and philosophical presuppositions concerning the value of the environment in its relation to humanity.⁵

⁴ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University, 1987), 175.

Secondly, the treatment of the environment by Western societies since the fusion of the previously separate fields of natural science and technological development that occurred in the mid-nineteenth has continued to worsen.⁶ As a result, writers have utilized Eastern thought as a deep reservoir of inspiration for environmental ethics. Emphasis on interrelated totality and aesthetic continuity stressed in Taoism and East Asian Buddhism has resonated well with the developing field of ecological science.⁷ Thus, developments in Western science have caused a reevaluation of certain *a priori* assumptions of Western ethics that impact the conceptual framework of environmental ethics. Deeply ingrained Western philosophical tropes such as the Cartesian dualism between subject and object, determinism, Kantian morals, consequentialism or utilitarianism, each having a proven efficacy for many other fields of practical or applied ethics, may not be well suited for a constructive environmental consciousness.

Ethicists have been speculating at length concerning the affluence of elements of East Asian worldviews with potential environmental ethics. An effective environmental ethic therefore must both incorporate a clear ontology that emphasizes the interconnectedness of human action with the natural world as well as a developed sense of the ethical nature of humankind. Watsuji is especially applicable because his philosophy is composed of a developed ontology with a strong relational ethos. For Watsuji spatiality is a key concept of ontology.⁸ Is Watsuji's conception of climate

⁵ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 55 (1967): 1203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1204.

⁷ Steve Odin, "The Japanese Concept of nature in Relation to Environmental Ethics and Conservation Aesthetics of Aldo Leopold," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (Winter 1991), 345.

synonymous with the metaphysical notion of the environment as conceived by environmental philosophy?

Watsuji's *Fūdo (Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study)* proposes that a people's phenomenological connection with their environment determines in part the composition of its cultural character. "Climate" is the composite set of features of a culture's habitat that determine the mood, form, tools, and behavioral patterns of its people. However, this relationship is not a simple cause-effect style of dynamic. When Watsuji refers to climate he speaks to the unity that exists between climate, as it is objectively measured and described by scientific observation, and the various cultural developments that emerge from climate. In the introduction to *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, Watsuji writes about the role of climate in determining the spatial and historical form of culture:

Climate, then, is the agent by which human life is objectivised [sic], and it is here that man comprehends himself; there is self-discovery in climate. We discover ourselves in all manner of significances every day; it may be in a pleasant or a sad mood, but such feelings or tempers are to be regarded not merely as mental states but as our way of life. These, moreover, are not feelings that we are free to choose ourselves, but are imposed on us as pre-determined states. Nor is it climate only that prescribes such pre-determined feelings, for our individual and social existence controls the way of life of the individual, which is dependent on it in the form of pre-existent relationships, and imparts to him determined moods; it may sometimes impart to a society a determined mood in the form of an existent historical situation.⁹

To explicate, climate is the medium through which the historical mode, or to Watsuji, culture of a human being is experienced. Humans understand their condition not just in

⁸ Gene H. Blocker and Christopher L. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), 129.

⁹ Watsuji Tetsurō, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, trans. Geoffrey Bownas (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1971), 14.

terms of themselves but in a unified thought that encapsulates both the human and the place where the human resides. All factors that come together to form the character of this habitat are what Watsuji refers to as climate. Watsuji is in dialogue with Martin Heidegger's (1889 – 1976) *Being and Time*. Watsuji feels that Heidegger was correct in his notion that *Being* is the means by which an entity “unfolds of itself into primordial appearance of openness, unhidness, and nonconcealment.”¹⁰ However, Watsuji breaks from Heidegger in emphasizing the spatial dimension of *Being* rather than the temporal.

While for Heidegger, humans realize the essence of *Being* through the unity of the human condition with time, Watsuji's focus on space is to show the phenomenological unity between human beings and the environment. The fundamental condition of human nature unfolds itself through the interconnectivity of humanity to its environment. An environmental ethic based on Watsuji's sense of the interrelatedness between humanity and its environment may take the form of a conservation ethic centered on preserving the environment for its aesthetic qualities. The seed of this notion of interrelatedness can be seen in Watsuji's early work. In *Ancient Japanese Culture*, Watsuji attempts to revivify early Japan's outlook for a modern Japanese nation by analyzing *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* as not only mythical/historic documents but as pieces of imaginative literary expression.¹¹ By examining the psychology of the poets who wrote the *Manyōshū*, Watsuji concludes that the ancient Japanese had an aesthetic relationship

¹⁰ Odin, 352.

¹¹ Furukawa Tetsushi, “Watsuji Tetsurō, the Man and His Work,” in *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study* by Watsuji Tetsurō, trans. Geoffrey Bownaas (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1971), 218-19.

with nature that precluded the division between subject and object; the relationship between humanity and nature is seen as a “single undivided experience.”¹² Because Watsuji’s ontology and ethics stresses both the interconnectedness between not only human beings and society but between human societies and the environment, Watsuji’s thought is well suited to a form of aesthetic conservation ethics such as those outlined by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*.¹³ So far, the spatial potentiality of the potential affluence between Watsuji’s thought and environmental ethics has been addressed, but what can be said of the ethical capacity of human beings to address and solve environmental problems?

In *Rinrigaku* Watsuji outlines ethics as *ningen sonzai* (human being as existence), or the absolute negativity to be found in the dialectic that is the in-betweenness of an individual and society.¹⁴ To Watsuji, ethics is the fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. In a reflection of the Zen syllogism “Mountains are Mountains,” Watsuji proposes that the process by which human beings arrive at moral conclusions is rooted in an “emptiness” at the heart of individual and society. Humanity is thus a dialect of negativity. Ethics is the “negation of negation.”¹⁵ Human totality, or the unity between the individual and society, is realized through a dialect of negation. Individuals cannot exist separate from their relative position to society and society in turn is made up of

¹² Ibid., 24.

¹³ Ibid., 351.

¹⁴ Watsuji Tetsurō, *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, trans. Robert E. Carter and Yamamoto Seisaku (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 23.

¹⁵ Ibid.

individuals; thus, individuality and society compose one another. Social ethics evolves out of the individual acting willfully by defining its will against society's will, negating it. Without awareness of self-will and choice there is no societal ethic. Second, the individual, using its self-awareness evaluates a given situation, and negates the first negation by returning to the total social entity in the form of action. This notion of dialectics and the relationship between the part and the whole can be extended to the bonds between human beings and then natural world.

This study seeks to explicate Watsuji's philosophy in terms of environmental thought, and thereby come to a possible new framework for viewing not just specific environmental issues but the overall dynamic between humanity and the environment. Questions raised by the brief sketching of Watsuji-philosophy thus far can be framed in terms of mutuality. Can the same ethical dialectic that exists between individual human beings and human societies be extended to the relationship between humanity and the environment? If such an extension is made, what are the responsibilities on the part of humans as groups and as individuals to the environment in a dialectic between *ningen sonzai* and the natural world?

Watsuji's thought on climate ends with conclusions concerning the uniqueness of Japan's climate, for Watsuji the unity of Japan's environmental character and the outlook of its people. If Watsuji's dialectic of *ningen sonzai* is applied to the natural world what are the cultural ramifications of this application? Watsuji's philosophy often focused on cultural criticism, and as a result his attentions focused on the particular character of Japan's cultural development. Is Watsuji's thought too particular to be extended to an environmental ethic for all of humanity and thus only suited for an environmental

philosophy in a distinctly Japanese context? Through a careful exegesis of Watsuji's thought paralleled with the development of Japan's relationship to its environment, both intellectually and socially, a clear image of the manner in which Watsuji's thought can be best applied to environmental ethics will emerge.

II. WATSUJI TETSURŌ'S LIFE AND CAREER

Watsuji Tetsurō's life stretched through several tumultuous periods of Japan's history. Born at the height of the Meiji Restoration, in 1889, and passing away eight years after the end of the U.S. Occupation, in 1960, Watsuji witnessed and was privy to comment upon a vast array of changes that affected all aspects of Japan's everyday and intellectual culture. His philosophy and cultural criticism were the products of a growing trend in Japan, which included the Kyoto School, to express Japanese thought using Western philosophical methodology and discourse.¹⁶ His significant intellectual contribution lies in expressing what he believed to be characteristic of Japan's ethics, religious culture, and artistic productions using techniques he adapted from readings of Husserl's (1859 – 1938) phenomenology and Heidegger's ontological theory, among other Western philosophical influences.¹⁷

¹⁶ Japanese philosophy prior to the Kyoto School was intertwined with Buddhism and Confucianism. Both outlooks, entering Japan through Chinese and Korean influence, had a seminal impact on the character of Japanese thought. Blocker's and Starling's *Japanese Philosophy*, discusses at length how to view the intellectual history of Japan in light of the Eurocentric associations of the commonly accepted definition of "philosophy," which, following the humanism of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, tends to mark a sharp dichotomy between religious and philosophical thought. According to Blocker and Starling, Japanese thinkers tend to conceive of their culture's intellectual output as being holistic, integrative, concrete, and aesthetic in nature; this is in contrast to the analytical, abstract, and logical character associated with Western thought. Blocker and Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), 8.

¹⁷ Robert E. Carter, "Interpretive Essay: Strands of Influence," in *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan* by Watsuji Tetsurō, trans. Robert E. Carter and Yamamoto Seisaku (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), 334.

What makes Watsuji's philosophy unique and of import is the manner in which he utilizes Buddhist philosophy to flesh out his ethical and cultural theory. In this respect Watsuji has been compared to Nishida Kitarō (1870 – 1945).¹⁸ However, Nishida left a body of writing from which his disciples had to infer a system of thought through analysis and interpretation; Watsuji, in contrast, has a more systematized approach to his subject matter. According to the commentator Gino K. Piovesana, this focus on the part of Watsuji may be attributable to "Watsuji's field of inquiry [being] limited to ethical problems."¹⁹ Although the character of Japanese ethics is a significant element of Watsuji's hermeneutical system, Piovesana may have mischaracterized Watsuji in that this is not Watsuji's sole concern. A concept critical to the understanding of his ethics, that also flows through the body of Watsuji's work, is an emphasis on humanity's phenomenological relation to its environment. Watsuji's system of thought rests on the interrelated concepts of *fūdo* (climaticity) and ethics as the study of humanity. The two veins of thought that run through the body of Watsuji's work are formed from the interaction of this exposure to European intentionality and Mahayana Buddhism.

However, by the publication of Watsuji's most seminal writings his thought had developed in such a way that the influence of Buddhist philosophy on his own system differed from the influence Buddhism had on Nishida and his disciples. Both philosophers apply a dialectical approach to uncovering the spatial dynamics inherent in human relationality.²⁰ Nishida sees this in terms of *basho* (place). Human relations are

¹⁸ Gino K. Piovesana, *Contemporary Japanese Philosophical Thought*, Asian Philosophical Studies (New York: St. John's University, 1969), 131

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

characterized fully in terms of context. Community and individuality are a linked set of self-contradictory elements in which the negation of individuality is the expression of the community's will and the will of the individual is expressed through the negation of the community.²¹ The point of departure for Watsuji is his emphasis on *aidagara* (the betweenness) that underlies the unity of self and other. This unity is underscored for Watsuji in the form of *basho* which Watsuji extends to *aidagara* or the field upon which human relationality, and ethics, takes place.²²

However, Nishida extends *basho* past relative context or place to include an ever more encompassing series of contexts until he is able to discuss the absolute and foundational level of *basho*, absolute nothingness. Nishida reaches this conclusion by applying Buddhist thought to his own philosophy as a form of religious vision.²³ If Nishida is using Buddhist philosophy as a key element in the content of his writing, Watsuji utilizes Buddhism as an element of his form. To Watsuji Buddhism's key impact is the ontological and epistemological conclusions he is able to reach with Buddhist methodology as a pillar of his thought's functionality.

1. Formative Years (1889-1916)

²⁰ A. Jacinto Zavala, "Watsuji Tetsurō," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, ed. and trans. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin Jacinto Zavala (London: Greenwood, 1998), 226.

²¹ Carter, 340-1.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 347.

In 1889, Watsuji Tetsurō was born in Hyōgo Prefecture; he was the second son of a physician.²⁴ Tetsushi Furukawa, writing in a brief biography that acts as an afterward to *Climate and Culture*, says of the importance of Watsuji's place of birth: "For a better comprehension of Watsuji's character, we must return again to the question of climate. He was born of the former Province of Harima which now forms a part of Himeji City, and we cannot understand his prolific literary output without reference to the climate of this part of the country."²⁵ Furukawa continues by comparing Watsuji's style of philosophy to two other writers from the same region Yanagida Kunio and Miki Kiyoshi, but rescinds on the significance of the climatic impact, as Watsuji would conceive of it, on writers from the region, claiming "not all authors hailing from the Harima area possess the qualities of this trio."²⁶ From here Furukawa, attempts to pinpoint the significance of Watsuji's early intellectual development in the figures that surrounded him during his period of academic growth.

However, this viewpoint undermines the significance that Watsuji's system assigned to the climate of Japan in general, and also reflects a misunderstanding of how Watsuji conceived the idea of climate.²⁷ Watsuji stresses continuously that climate does not have a cause-effect type impact on people that live there, but rather when he discusses it, it is in terms of the unity that is present between humanity and his environment. Both

²⁴ Zavala, 222.

²⁵ Furukawa, 217.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 47.

Watsuji's early travel writing²⁸ and later in *Climate and Culture* contain comparisons of the architectural, cultural, and religious sites that Watsuji visits in Europe with similar places in Japan and East Asia.²⁹ To say that the impact of Hyōgo Prefecture's climate is minimal in the development of Watsuji's thought is accurate, but this neglects the impact that Japan's climate as a whole had on Watsuji. When Watsuji compares Japanese religious sites to those he visits in Europe, Watsuji is demonstrating the impact that Japanese climate, as a unity of space and human cultural development, had on his perception. To proceed with Furukawa's logic is to make the mistake that there is a verifiable, objective and measurable impact of climate on human development which is impossible according to Watsuji's system because this uses the idea of climate as a scientific abstraction rather than a phenomenological concept. Thus, Furukawa is correct in continuing on to describe the academic career of Watsuji, but what must be kept in mind in the context of Watsuji's system is that these thinkers are the product of the climatic influence that Watsuji discusses in his later works and are thus diffusing the impact of Japan's climate onto Watsuji through education.

As Watsuji's early academic career progressed, it became clear that he was greatly influenced by the Western literary and philosophical writers he encountered in his

²⁸ For examples see "Pilgrimages to Ancient Cathedrals in Italy" as well as "What has Japan to Be Proud of?" Furukawa observes correctly that these writings contain the embryonic form of ideas that would gestate later in *Climate and Culture*. In both, as well as later in *Climate and Culture*, Watsuji often compares Japan's climatic features with those of the sites he visits on his late 1920s tour of Europe. Furukawa, 211.

²⁹ In his discussion of *sabaku*, the desert climate, Watsuji stresses that his discussion of the desert is restrained to the desert as a "state of man." Desert has thus been altered hermeneutically by Watsuji to refer to the social and individual character of the desert that is reflected in the historical character of humanity as opposed to the scientific definition of what can be considered a desert climate. Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 40-1.

studies. Having completed primary school in 1900, the young Watsuji received the finest education available in the Japan of his time; he was admitted to the First Higher School of Tokyo in 1906, where he studied with the likes of Kuki Shūzō and Amano Teiyū, and graduated 1909.³⁰ In his early career, Watsuji was influenced heavily by his principal, Nitobe Inazo³¹ as well as the renowned novelist Natsume Soseki (1867 – 1917), whose lectures Watsuji would listen to from just outside the classroom window when he had no other lectures to attend.³² Watsuji familiarized himself with Soseki's writing through his "patriotic poetry" in *Jūgunkō* (*Marching with the Army*) a collection published in 1904 during the Russo-Japanese War. However, Watsuji approved more of the writing of Yosano Akiko, who expresses in her emotive style the wish that her brother would return from the war unscathed.³³ Initially, Watsuji had harbored hopes of becoming a poet or playwright himself and was greatly influenced by Byron (1788 – 1824) and Shaw (1856 – 1950); he produced translations of both their works in addition to working on a literary magazine with Tanizaki Junichirō.³⁴ However, this professional interest in literature would not be sustained for long. Even though he contributed two novels to literary publications in 1907 and 1908, *Pillars of Fire* and *The Romance of the Rape-Blossom*, his

³⁰ Robert N. Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsurō," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 4 (August 1965): 578.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Furukawa, 218.

³³ Zavala, 223.

³⁴ Bellah, 578.

interested soon veered away from literary publication after the complete failure of an attempt at playwriting.³⁵

The September following his graduation, Watsuji enrolled in the Faculty of Literature at Tokyo Imperial University with a specialization in philosophy. Among his new teachers, he found the spiritual support and encouragement of Tenshin Okakura (1863 – 1913) and the guidance of the influential Russian professor of philosophy at Tokyo University, Raphael Koeber, most effective.³⁶ During this period, in search of a quiet place to write his thesis, Watsuji lived in the house of a roommate, Takase. Takase's mother sent her daughter Teru to set Takase's house in order and Teru also began to assist in the production of the final copy of Watsuij's thesis. Teru and Watsuji were married in 1912.³⁷ Initially, Watsuji attempted to submit a thesis entitled *Nietzschean Studies*, but the academic climate of the Imperial University of Tokyo at this time was sour toward a poet-philosopher such as Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) and Watsuji was forced to start anew. As a result, he changed tracks and produced *Schopenhauer's Pessimism and Theory of Salvation* with barely enough time for his graduation in July 1912.³⁸

Watsuji immediately enrolled in graduate school and began production and publication of several treatises on Western philosophers from the continental tradition. Even though Watsuji's work at this time appeared to be simply exegetical productions of

³⁵ Furukawa, 218.

³⁶ Bellah, 578.

³⁷ Zavala, 221.

³⁸ Furukawa, 219.

other philosophers, he was making an important contribution to the intellectual climate of Japan. Prior to his studies, Japan had not encountered philosophers of the likes of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855), and Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860); around 1915, these thinkers were not commonly covered in textbooks that discussed the history of philosophy. Orthodox thought in Japan concerning the nature of philosophy considered these thinkers to be poet-philosophers and as such had not been addressed with any serious fervor prior to Watsuji's study.³⁹ Thus, Watsuji's publications of writings on Nietzsche, 1913 and 1915, Schopenhauer, 1912, and Kierkegaard, 1915, saw the introduction of early existentialist thought to Japanese consciousness.⁴⁰

2. Comparative Studies of Ancient Cultures (1917-1927)

The next stage of Watsuji's career is representative of intellectual trends that developed throughout Taishō culture. Watsuji's growing skepticism and criticism of Western influences upon Japanese culture combined with his tendency toward poetical-philosophy to produce a new direction for his thought. Rather than settle with grasping, understanding, and appreciating Western philosophy as an abstraction, Watsuji sought to utilize his philosophical foundations to express the character and importance of ancient Japan. Watsuji was moving beyond the Meiji Restoration understanding of *kokutai* (national pillar). His philosophical foundations, influenced by historical trends, led Watsuji to dig deeper, and he sought to express the *Weltaunschaung* of Japan for his day in terms of the nation's ancestral past.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bellah, 578.

During the early Taishō period educated Japanese youth began to experience the world differently. Meiji youth had been brought up on a theory of civilization in which societies developed along a hierarchic ladder; the goal was for a culture to advance by degrees until it was competitive with other advanced nations.⁴¹ By 1912 Japan had established itself as an aggressive, developed, and modern power through conflicts with both China and Russia. The combined influences of rapid developments domestically and the turbulent international scene of World War I, which was followed by many deep reflections on modern society across the globe in the conflict's wake, created an environment in Japan ripe for personal introspection. The historian Marius B. Jansen describes the period following Japan's rapid development during the Meiji era: "Now what began to matter was 'culture,' being rather than doing, and feeling rather than achieving. The sense of collective national crisis was replaced by a sense of individual and existential crisis. Introspection and doubt replaced the formulaic invocation of the previous generation."⁴² However, by the time Watsuji's intellectual sensibilities had matured, this cosmopolitan outlook began to ring hollow and he had come to question the individuation espoused by his early studies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

It has been suggested that the turning point for Watsuji regarding this issue was the death of Natsume Soseki.⁴³ Late in his career, Soseki had repudiated his earlier emphasis on individualism and espoused a position of self-abandonment in favor of what

⁴¹ Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2000), 548.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Jeffrey Wu, "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Studies* 1 (Spring 2001), 97.

he called “following heaven.”⁴⁴ Soseki’s last novels had a great impact on Watsuji, and reminiscences of Soseki in works such as *The Resurgence of the Idols* stressed that Watsuji respected Soseki’s love of *ningen*, humanity. Watsuji was in accordance with Soseki’s rejection of insincerity, egoism, impurity, and immorality. Philosophers that Watsuji had previously studied with relish only left him at the precipice of a gaping abyss. In an analysis of Watsuji’s ethical system, Jeffrey Wu writes, “Therefore, by 1918 Watsuji had disavowed the individual as a legitimate basis of ethical action. Given the high esteem generally accorded to the ideas *kyōdōtai* (community) in public discourses of the period, it is not surprising that Watsuji turned toward the community as the true subject of benevolence, compassion, and morality.”⁴⁵ Thus, these experiences and ruminations led Watsuji to the bulk of his written output in the 1920s which focused on the culturally specific form that community took from nation to nation. His philosophy during this period had turned to artful examinations of the distinctive elements of ancient Japanese and Asian cultures.

Even though Watsuji’s professional interests began to eschew certain elements of modern Japanese life in favor of musings on Japan’s ancestral past, his career led him to positions within Japan’s flowering academic community that thrust him to the forefront of debates over these issues. In 1920, he became a lecturer at Tōyō University; this appointment was followed successively by positions at Hōsei University in 1922 and Keiō University from the end of 1922 through 1923.⁴⁶ By 1925, Nishida Kitarō and

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Zavala, 221.

Hatano Seiichi (1877 – 1950), seeing Watsuji’s potential as a scholar and lecturer, invited him to take charge of courses in ethics at Kyoto Imperial University in the Philosophy Department of the Faculty of Literature.⁴⁷ Watsuji would remain here, writing and teaching, until 1927 when he commenced his studies abroad in Europe.

Much like his peer Tanizaki Junichirō and his teacher Natsume Soseki, Watsuji had a turning in his thought that caused him to veer away from embracing all things Western and to reevaluate the value of Japan’s indigenous culture. This change in his thought is best demonstrated by a work he wrote in 1918 *Gūzō saikō (The Resurgence of the Idols)*.⁴⁸ This treatise can be considered the emergence of Watsuji’s true voice and the beginning of his system’s solidification by redressing the issue of Japan’s cultural heritage in a historical environment in which the Japanese state was modernizing rapidly. Piovesana says of this critical work:

This . . . work was also directed against the ‘platitudes’ heaped on the modern democratic spirit. During this early period Watsuji strongly favored Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* and the ‘élite’ spirit as well as the poetical revival of the cult of nature in ancient Greece. He adopted an existential *Lebensphilosophie* mixed with Nietzschean stoicism, feeling that, in the world, the problem of suffering was paramount.⁴⁹

Watsuji is critically analyzing Western individualism from the standpoint of an educated Japanese observer who comes to conclude that Japan’s ancestral past should be a source of inspiration for its current and future development. At this stage in the development of his ethics, he adopts an attitude toward pain that fuses neo-Kantian morals with a Buddhist understanding of suffering.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Piovesana, 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The significance of this work for Watsuji's development is twofold. For one, *The Resurgence of the Idols* sees Watsuji criticize his earlier Western philosophical influences. He has moved beyond the sophisticated explication of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard that composed the foundation of his philosophical study. The revival that Watsuji calls for is centered upon an attack on the contemporary bourgeois spirit of his day and a return to the sensibilities of the Japanese past.⁵⁰ This is a theme to which Watsuji will return time and again throughout his career. In fact, it lays the groundwork for a more developed criticism of individualism that would appear in his writings of the 1930s and 1940s, such as *Rinrigaku*. In the West, philosophical thought often starts with the presumption of the existence of the individual, who in its interaction with other similar human individuals goes about the work of creating a society through the interaction of essentially isolated identities. However, Watsuji questions this premise and the foundational starting point for his ethics is that human beings are both individual and social, as a unified, selfless non-duality "that expresses itself as benevolence or compassion."⁵¹ The development of this new vein of thought occurs simultaneously with Watsuji's other critical leap forward in this piece which is the demonstration of the impact his early philosophical studies had on his form. Where Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are said to be poet-philosophers, *The Resurgence of the Idols* has much in it that can be viewed as having the tone and timber of a writer of poetic-philosophy.⁵²

⁵⁰ Zavala, 223-4.

⁵¹ Carter, 331.

⁵² Furukawa, 219.

Next, Watsuji continued to explore Japan's past in a series of works focusing on specific Japanese cultural elements that ranged from architecture to literature. The 1919 work *Koji junrei (A Pilgrimage to Ancient Temples)* is a fusion of travelogue and intellectual history that addresses Watsuji's observations of Nara period temples.⁵³

Furukawa translates a portion of Watsuji's reaction to the Toshodaiji Temple at Nara:

A clump of tall pine trees surrounding the Temple gave an ineffable feeling of intimacy. Between the pine-grove and this monument of ancient architecture there certainly is an affinity both intimate and ineffable. I do not think a piece of Western architecture, of whatever kind or style, would match so well with the sentiment aroused at the sight of the pine-grove. To encircle the Parthenon with a clump of pine trees would be unthinkable . . . Such buildings should only be contemplated in conjunction with the towns and cities, forests and fields of their respective lands. Just so do our Buddhist temples have something intimately connected with and inseparable from the characteristic features of our native shores. If there are to be found some traces of the Northern forest in Gothic architecture, can we not say with equally good reason that there are in our Buddhist temples some traces of Japanese pine and cypress forest? Do we not feel in those curving roofs something of the influence of the branches of our gentle pines? Is there nothing to be perceived in the look of the temple as a whole with its reminiscences of a stately old pine or cypress adorned with thick evergreen foliage? The traditional origins of our wooden buildings in the East are of great interest when we try to reduce differences in culture to differences in climate.⁵⁴

Watsuji argued that the character of Toshodaiji Temple and other Japanese temples is derived from a unity of the building itself and its environment. Examination of the structure revealed an affinity between its material components, form, and the surrounding scenery. In addition, Watsuji emphasized that the aesthetic unity found in architecture differs from culture to culture based on climate. These ideas would be the groundwork for later works such as *Climate and Culture*.

⁵³ Zavala, 224.

⁵⁴ Furukawa, 212-3.

Continuing to lay the foundations for later inquires, Watsuji also plunged into philosophical evaluations and appraisals of canonical Japanese texts. He began publishing a series of essays that ran from 1920 to 1936 under the titles of *Nihon kodai bunka* (*Ancient Japanese Culture*).⁵⁵ The topics Watsuji covered in this series varied widely. Initially, he addressed the origins of the Japanese people, the art of *Kojiki*, *Nihonshoki*, the poetry of the *Manyōshū* collection, ancient religion and morality, as well as the introduction of Chinese writing. Stressing conventional patterns of Japanese behavior, Watsuji expressed “an attitude which considered nature as a harmonic synthesis placing man beyond good and evil.”⁵⁶ Therefore, his goal in these pieces was to fully flesh out the constitutive elements of Japan’s intellectual, religious, and cultural character. According to Furukawa, “That interest [in Japanese antiquity] was first aroused by the question what sort of men it was who created great monuments of art such as the sculptures and buildings of the Asuka and the Nara Eras. It is impossible to say that he had no intention at all of reviving the old.”⁵⁷ Watsuji drew on a deep reservoir from Japan’s history to utilizing a variety of contemporary techniques, perspectives, and methods.

After his appointment to Kyoto Imperial University in 1925, Watsuji started work on a series of essays that not only advanced aesthetical studies of Japanese art and literature but also revitalized interest in a Buddhist figure that had begun to wane in popularity. Watsuji applied Husserl’s phenomenology and neo-Kantian historiography,

⁵⁵ Piovesana, 134.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Furukawa, 226.

with previous theoretical underpinnings provided by Nishida Kitarō, to explore the intentionality of Japanese religion and art to further explicate the composition of the Japanese spirit.⁵⁸ *Nihon seishinshi, A Study of the History of the Japanese Spirit*, was published from 1925 through the mid-1930s.⁵⁹ The focal point of Watsuji's discussion was Buddhist thought and art in relation to the Japanese spirit.⁶⁰

The most significant portion of this work was Watsuji's groundbreaking study of Dōgen (1200-1253), the founder of the Soto Sect of Zen Buddhism; up until Watsuji's analysis, a good portion of the monk's thought had fallen into obscurity and was brought back into the modern consciousness by Watsuji's treatment.⁶¹ This series also featured discussions of Heian period (794 – 1185) literature such as Murasaki Shikibu's (973 – 1031) *The Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shōnagon.⁶² Prior to leaving for Europe in 1927, Watsuji published *Kirisutokyō no bunkashiteki igi (The Significance of Primitive Christianity in Cultural History)*, as well as, *Genshi Bukkyō no jissen tetsugaku, (The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism)*.⁶³ By the age of thirty-seven, Watsuji had already become a prolific writer concerning both Western philosophy and Japan's cultural character. However, the encounters he has in the next stage of his development would push Watsuji to fully develop his system of thought.

⁵⁸ Zavala, 224.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Piovesana, 134.

⁶¹ Zavala, 224.

⁶² Piovesana, 134-5.

⁶³ Zavala, 224.

3. The Two Pillars (1927-1948)

In March of 1927, Watsuji was sent at the behest of the Japanese government to travel and study in Europe. Although Watsuji's time abroad occurred during the first years of the Shōwa period, his travels outside of Japan were not unique to him alone but an experience shared by many cultural elites.⁶⁴ A significant aspect of this time abroad was the pull that Watsuji felt from German philosophical influences. Although Germany still remained a hallmark of advanced analytical reasoning, worthy of emulation in the eyes of many Japanese scholars, Watsuji's studies there reflected a shift in the emphasis of these pursuits. In the 1920s, thinkers like Watsuji and his colleague Kuki Shūzō began to shy away from neo-Kantianism and embraced the developing field of phenomenology started by Husserl and being continued energetically at the time of their travels by Heidegger.⁶⁵ It was this experience that would inspire him in part to develop the twin pillars of his system of thought, climaticity and ethics as the study of humanity.⁶⁶

Watsuji traveled throughout Europe, spending time studying in Germany, from spring of 1927 to the summer of 1928, when he returned to Kyoto. In 1934, he received an appointment at Tokyo Imperial University; Watsuji would hold this position until he reached the retirement age of sixty in 1949.⁶⁷ By 1929, Watsuji had assisted in the editing of and produced a translation for Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. Watsuji's study of

⁶⁴Jansen, 550.

⁶⁵ Blocker and Starling, 128.

⁶⁶ Watsuji's term for this is "ethics as the study of man."

⁶⁷ Zavala, 224.

primitive Buddhism earned him a Doctorate of Letters in 1934 and he wrote studies of Homer and Hellenistic culture throughout the 1930s and 1940s.⁶⁸ In 1934, Watsuji published *Ethics as the Study of Man*; his landmark essay on ethics that was the basis for his moral philosophy.⁶⁹ He continued his study of ethics in his opus *Rinrigaku* which was released as three successive volumes in 1937, 1942, and 1949.⁷⁰ In 1944, Watsuji produced two pieces for the Japanese government published together as a pamphlet, *Nihon no shindō, The Way of the Japanese Subject* and *Amerika no kokuminsei (The Character of the American People)* as part of a propaganda effort during the years of the Pacific War. The commentator Robert H. Bellah comments on the reasoning for Watsuji's eagerness to assist the Imperial government: "But the West is a threat as well as a source of light. The West threatens not only the political integrity but the cultural identity of the East. Watsuji's immersion in Western studies had . . . raised a problem of cultural identity and cultural self-respect."⁷¹ In Watsuji's mind, the climatic and ethical distinctiveness of Japan was being encroached upon by certain Western influences.

In 1929 Watsuji began a lecture series that would be published in 1936 as *Fūdo*, (*Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*); this would be the first pillar of Watsuji's thought. In the past his principle concerns had led Watsuji to examine the cultural underpinnings of not only Japan but early Christian and Buddhist cultures as well. His work with the *Manyōshū* and the *Kojiki* in particular express the relationship that the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 225.

⁶⁹ Furukawa, 228.

⁷⁰ Zavala, 225.

⁷¹ Bellah, 588.

ancient Japanese had with nature that superseded distinctions between subjective and objective reality.⁷² Later, in *Climate and Culture* Watsuji would address the issue of climate phenomenological using the studies of intentionality he mastered while in Europe and combining this with his personal observations of European climate.

Climate and Culture's claims rests on two related concepts. One is the understanding that climate as Watsuji addresses it are the historical and cultural developments that emerge from the interrelation of humanity and its environment. However, Watsuji stresses, "To consider a sea-food diet as climatic phenomenon is not to regard climate merely as natural environment. To interpret artistic style in relation to climate is to indicate the inseparability of climate from history. The most frequent misunderstanding about climate occurs in the commonplace view that influences exist between man and his natural environment."⁷³ Watsuji asserts that his study of climate is not the apprehension of the scientifically materialistic view of climate as a collection of data that could have a set of consequences, based on the composition of the climate, for human existence. Here, Watsuji is departing from Heidegger whose influence is present throughout *Climate and Culture* as Watsuji wrote it in part to respond to Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*.⁷⁴ Watsuji felt that Heidegger's treatment of human existence as being intricately related with time was fascinating but neglected the crucial element of space. Watsuji writes, "Hence, space and time in this self-active sense, form the fundamental structure of these activities. It is at this point that space and time are

⁷² Furukawa, 221-4.

⁷³ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 8.

⁷⁴ Bellah, 588.

grasped in their essential form and their inseparability becomes distinct. An attempt to treat the structure of human existence as one of time only would fall into the error of trying to discover human existence on the level of only individual consciousness.”⁷⁵ Hence, the interrelatedness of time and space is also at the heart of the connection between humanity’s dual-nature as both individual and social. Watsuji thus sought to address an analysis of human being that analyzed the spatial, and thus to Watsuji historical, element of this dynamic in the form of climate.

The second pillar of Watsuji’s thought is his system of ethics. Watsuji derives his ethics from many philosophical sources, blending Eastern and Western conceptions of morality to conclude that to get at what is ethical is to also strike at the heart of what it means to be human. Diverging from deontological ethics, such as Kant, and the virtue ethics, Aristotle’s suppositions relying on the abstract immutability of the individual for virtue to be achieved, Watsuji sees ethics as a dialectical process of human action and being. Watsuji opens with a philological analysis of the Japanese concepts of *ningen* (human being) and *sonzai* (existence). During the laying of this language based groundwork, Watsuji once again turns to Heidegger for both inspiration and as a source of departure for discussing human being. Watsuji finds Heidegger’s technique of discussing human existence as *being in the world* as correct but the successive phenomenological arguments overlook interpersonal relations in favor of the relationship between humans and their tools.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 9.

⁷⁶ Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, 16-7.

Rather Watsuji envisions the idea of humans *being in the world* as a movement of negation. He writes: “Out of this ground, [emptiness], from the fact that this emptiness is emptied, emerges *ningen’s sonzai* as a movement of negation. The negation of negation is the self-returning and self-realizing movement of the absolute totality that is precisely social ethics . . . Therefore, the basic principle of social ethics is the realization of the totality (as the negation of negation) through the individual (that is, the negation of totality).”⁷⁷ Watsuji’s discussion of ethics and human existence emerging out of emptiness reflects the Buddhist methodology that he uses to frame his adaptation of phenomenological intentionality. To explicate, human beings exist as a superindividual whole that transcends both conceptual notions of community and individual. The emergence of either is the result of a negation of this totality. The individual will coalesces as the result of negative activity against the state and the state exerts its will in the negation of the individual.

Ultimately, there is a unifying homeground at the base of this structure that creates a system out of which ethical reality emerges. Watsuji continues later in the text:

Individuals are empty in themselves; only the negation of their respective community establishes them. If so, then we can say that before the individuality of the subject is discarded in the associative collectivity, this individuality was already established through the negation of community. Therefore, association is “the discarding of individuality that appears in the form of the discarding of community.” This is double-negation.⁷⁸

The emphasis on double-negation demonstrates that ethics is not merely the result of the community exerting its will over and above the individual. There is a process by which the emptiness inherent in both the individual and society act as *aidagara* (betweenness).

⁷⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 115.

This unifying ground of being is an actuality that prevents the individual from being a pure abstraction and society from totally overwhelming the individual. Ethics is the interplay of ideas and actions in the intentional space between these two forces in which each side regularly compromises for the good of the other. However, Watsuji's political leanings do require questioning of this system due to the threat of Watsuji's conception of totality adversely stifling individual development.

Watsuji's compliance with the wartime government has received intense criticism and later in his career he attempts to repudiate it. However, commentators such as Robert H. Bellah have asserted that there are elements in Watsuji's philosophical system that while claiming ethics emerges dialectically favors the good of the state over the individual due to certain ontological assumptions.⁷⁹ Watsuji's philosophy did express a degree of cultural particularism, but his manner of expressing it did not descend to mere diatribe. To Watsuji the Western notion of an individual was a hollow abstraction. Individuals only existed in the context of double-negation and as such are the result of a process involving a social environment. This idea in itself was not problematic, but Watsuji extended it to include a systematic triad of individual, society, and the unifying force of the Japanese emperor.⁸⁰ To Watsuji Western society emphasized far too much the development of its *gesellschaft*. Underlying assumptions about the nature of the individual led to the development of utilitarianism, positivism, legalism, and scientific materialism. Japan's notion of *kyōdōtai* (community) was more in synch in Watsuji's approximation to Tönnies's notion of *gemeinschaft*, but Watsuji's departure is that

⁷⁹ Bellah 591.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 592.

gesellschaft is not the sole possible development out of cultural progress. Community and cultural integrity could be maintained through modernization, but Watsuji's emphasis was misplaced in his notion of a transcendental unity brought about by the symbolic and cultural binding of the *tennō* (Emperor) figure.⁸¹

Watsuji claims that European and Japanese family structures reflect aspects of the state structure in both cultures. European culture's individualism leads to a compartmentalized familial structure. In turn, individuals in Western society view each other and him or herself as autonomous. Eastern, monsoon, family structure is characterized by Watsuji as "open, unpartitioned."⁸² Family members interact in a linked, undiluted whole. The state reflecting this familial unity is a larger extension of the family unit operating under the edicts of filial piety. The emperor is the fatherly apex of this all encompassing statewide family in the same fashion as a father is the apex of the household unit. Watsuji's argument seems to hinge on extending a Confucian understanding of human relations to the functioning of a modern state. In addition, this application of Confucianism is done in the context of Watsuji's exegetical writing on climate in *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*.⁸³ However, close analysis of Watsuji's analogy shows that it stands on weaker ground than first anticipated.

The breakdown occurs due to the position of the emperor in Japanese society. Watsuji ascribes the *tennō* with the significance of being the centerpiece of a functional Japanese state. However, this centrality is not political but rather of a spiritual

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Blocker and Starling, 131.

⁸³ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 147-8.

significance for the Shōwa period and the emperor becomes more than a human political element but in the mind's of many an all-pervasive unifying element of Japanese culture. If this figure is to some extent transcendent due to either lineage or the esteem by which he is held, then the emperor would seem to be outside of the dialectic under which Watsuji's ethics operates.

4. Later Years (1949-1960)

Watsuji's final period of production lasted from 1949 until his death in 1960. During this time he revised and finalized the form of his philosophical system.⁸⁴ This period is characterized by a reevaluation of a number of his previous stances expressed in earlier works, especially with regards to the role of the state in ethics and social being. Criticism for the degree to which Watsuji's ethics emphasizes the transcendental and absolute nature of state consciousness has been addressed in commentaries by both Bellah and Piovesana.⁸⁵ However, it is during this last span of professional production that Watsuji repudiates some of these positions in the light of observations he made following Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. Watsuji also rounded out his studies with the 1952 and 1953 publication of the two volume *Nihon rinri shisōshi, History of Japanese Ethical Thought*. Here, Watsuji meticulously crafts the ethical history of Japan through the Nara (710 – 794), Heian (794 – 1185), Kamakura (1185 – 1333) Muromachi (1336 – 1573), Tokugawa (1603 – 1868), and Meiji periods (1868 – 1912). His last

⁸⁴ Zavala, 225.

⁸⁵ Carter, 353.

works were studies of Japanese architecture and art, as well as a planned but unfinished autobiography. He passed in 1960.

Watsuji has expressed that he wished as a boy to write a work such as *Faust* using his own experiences, and the natural question that follows is which of Watsuji's works can be considered his *Faust*?⁸⁶ It has been suggested by Furukawa that Watsuji's character as a poet-philosopher is best expressed through works such as *Climate and Culture* and because of the poetic language of this work it should be considered Watsuji's *Faust*.⁸⁷ However, it seems more probable that one of his final works, *Sakoku – Nihon no higeki (Closed County – The Tragedy of Japan)* written in 1950 may be more deserving of this appraisal.

Collecting conversations he had with a research group on ethics that began meeting in 1945 and continued through thirty-nine sessions until February 8th, 1946 Watsuji published *A Closed County – The Tragedy of Japan* in 1950.⁸⁸ In this work, Watsuji attempted to answer questions concerning what particular characteristics of Japanese culture led to Japan's disastrous period of aggression in East Asia from the Russo-Japanese War until the end of the Pacific War. Bellah describes Watsuji's conclusions in this work: "Perhaps the chief defect of the closed country policy was that it greatly retarded the scientific spirit in Japan. . . . just at the time when it was making its greatest advances in Europe. The other side of the coin is that the closed country policy allowed the vigorous development of an unusually narrow fanaticism, based on intuition

⁸⁶ Furukawa, 235.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Piovesana, 135.

rather than reason, which considered everything Japanese to be superior.”⁸⁹ Watsuji determines that *sakoku* policy enacted by the Tokugawa authorities in the seventeenth century led to a deficit in modernization. This vacuum was filled by a much too rapid modernization during the Meiji Restoration that did not allow time for a thorough appraisal of the direction in which Japan was heading by its intellectual and political authorities. This need for development was coupled with a much too spirited will to compete with other global powers under Japanese state control.⁹⁰

Watsuji’s legacy lies in the originality of his aesthetic, ethical, and ontological philosophy in addition to the syncretism that characterizes it. Drawing from Buddhist, Confucian, Shinto-nativist, and Western hermeneutical-phenomenological sources, Watsuji contributes a body of work to the annals of Japanese philosophy that explore ambitiously the dimensions of human relations and the character of the Japanese spirit.⁹¹ In addition, Watsuji’s intellectual development is a very useful microcosm of intellectual and academic trends of educated Japanese elites during the Taishō and Shōwa periods. Even though Watsuji’s zeal concerning the nation of Japan and the position of the emperor may have overwhelmed his academic responsibility and rational scrutiny, his system is brimming with value and potential for practical applications to contemporary concerns. Ultimately, the Buddhist elements in his ethical system permit opportunities for universalizing Watsuji’s thought beyond the cultural particularism that seems to be its major weakness.

⁸⁹ Bellah, 590.

⁹⁰ Jansen, 94.

⁹¹ Zavala, 225-6.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS FROM THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Environmental ethics and philosophy is a field that has been developing since the 1940s. However, the philosophical issues that this relatively contemporary branch of Western philosophy addresses are as old as Western thought itself. Questions of naturalism and teleological purpose are issues broached respectively by Plato and Aristotle. The split between consequentialist and deontological ethics is one that has been developing before and since Kant, through and after Bentham and J.S. Mill.⁹² The question of humanity's "natural" character is one that has concerned both Hobbes and Rousseau in terms of the potential for human beings to pursue the good in society premised supposedly on either one of these views of human nature.

Environmental ethics and philosophy, then, is a field of thought devoted to the contemplation and development of systematic moral positions that attempt to answer questions and settle disputes concerning how humanity should exist in relation to its natural environment. The field raises questions of values, obligations, rights, orientations and responsibilities in relation to the environment and seeks as a form of applied or practical ethics to suggest possible courses of action for specific and emerging environmental scenarios. For the purposes of this study, a brief overview of major thought in the field shall be covered in order to lay the foundation of a set of issues that Watsuji's philosophical system may be able to address.

⁹² Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 10-2.

1. Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic

When Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), American conservation, ecologist, writer, and expert in game management, began to explicate his concerns over humanity's relationship to its environment, ecology was just beginning to emerge as a field of study.⁹³ During his career as a conservationist in 1933, he was considered the authority on managing game species. At the time, this work's perception of the natural environment held that every element therein was either a "crop" or "resource." Thus, Leopold worked within a system that held the environment only in good esteem as long as it was able to be taken advantage of for the purposes of supporting the privileges to which humanity felt entitled.⁹⁴ Leopold would write concerning the need to eliminate predators in order to ensure a steady supply of game for both hunting and resource acquisition. However, his experience in the field and growing ecological awareness soon caused Leopold to realize that such a viewpoint undercuts the interconnectedness inherent in nature, endangering the subsistence of the very goods that humanity enjoys extracting from the environment.

Leopold's major contribution to environmental ethics is the concept of the Land Ethic. He outlines this notion in a text that is both a collection of personal observations about nature as well as a collection of essays entitled *A Sand County Almanac*. In this landmark piece on ecology and ethics, Leopold stresses his contention over the general view of nature as a mechanistic object "that could be manipulated for human ends

⁹³ Joseph R. Des Jardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth), 189.

⁹⁴ Odin, 346-7.

without repercussion.”⁹⁵ To Leopold such a perception is incorrect because it treats the land as something “dead,” thus undermining the interconnectedness of nature, despite evidence that even raw earth teems with small organisms. Leopold’s criticisms of contemporary perceptions of land use and the environment stem over a conflict between instrumental and intrinsic value; people wish to see and use the land only as a reservoir of resources while Leopold is suggesting otherwise.

Leopold adopts a position of “extensionism” which enlarges the boundaries of community to include elements of the land as well as human beings and their needs. Water, soil, birds, and animals are all accorded “biotic rights” due to their unique positions within living ecological systems.⁹⁶ However, Leopold never states that treating biotic elements as resources is immoral. Rather than grant rights to individual elements of ecological systems, Leopold seeks to value the rights of the whole. Here, the land is valued on the basis of ethical holism. Individual plants and animals may be harvested as long as the entire system is protected.⁹⁷ Thus, Leopold has shifted the role of human beings in regards to nature from that of conqueror to “biotic citizens.” Aldo Leopold concisely states his view: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”⁹⁸ Simply put, the Land Ethic is a moral position by which right use of the land and its organisms is permitted as long as the greater whole is not harmed or injured.

⁹⁵ Des Jardins, 190.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Leopold, 224-5.

2. Arne Næss and Deep Ecology

Deep ecology is an environmental movement dedicated to both personal and social change in relation to the environment. Unlike the Land Ethic, deep ecology does not emerge from a single primary source. Rather, it is a hodgepodge of approaches to the problem of the environment that range from non-anthropocentric theories of environmentalism derived from cultural traditions other than the West to highly developed philosophical systems such as Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss's "Ecosophy T."⁹⁹ The term "deep ecology" has been adapted by many groups concerned with both ecology and the environment. In general, it can be characterized as believing that the current state of the environment, which deep ecology views as a state of crisis, is resultant from engrained philosophical causes.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in order to solve the current environmental crisis there needs to be a radical restructuring of philosophical outlook.

In 1973, Næss was one of the first philosophers to introduce the dichotomy between "shallow" and "deep" environmental concerns. Shallow environmental perspectives are those that seek to only address the symptoms of the problems facing the environment, in forms such as pollution and resource management. Næss believed that these forms of "shallow" environmentalism sought only to protect the affluence and health of people living in developed nations.¹⁰¹ David Rothenberg says of Næss's view of environmental philosophy: "The philosophical side of ecophilosophy investigates the particular methods of viewing the world that lead different individuals to something like the platform of deep ecology. Næss calls this reasoning process *ecosophy*, if it becomes

⁹⁹ Des Jardins, 214.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 215.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

articulated in a philosophical manner.”¹⁰² Thus, to Næss the development of what he calls ecophilosophy is an aspect of personal growth, referred to as Self-realization. Self-realization is the process by which an individual comes to perceive her or his place as part of a greater and whole, a self that is indistinguishable from the natural world.¹⁰³

Two serious veins of criticism have addressed both the deep ecology movement and the systematized philosophy of Arne Næss. Often deep ecology is criticized for being opaque and over eclectic. The movement and philosophy draw on sources that include: “Taoism, Heraclitus, Spinoza, Whitehead, Gandhi, Buddhism, Native American cultures, Thomas Jefferson, Thoreau, and Woody Guthrie.”¹⁰⁴ Such a wide array of influences and sources of inspiration that impact one outlook has the potential to stymie the development of that perspective due to an unintelligibility that is rendered through a lack of coherent systemization. Deep ecology, secondly, has come under fire from subsequent thinkers in the field of environmental philosophy because it has the potential to be both elitist and so abstract as to miss the cause of the environmental crisis deep ecology seeks to ameliorate.¹⁰⁵

3. Radical Ecophilosophy: Social Ecology and Ecofeminism

Thus far environmental ethics, with ecology as a foundational element, has reversed common assumptions concerning the impact of communities on individuals and

¹⁰² Arne Næss, *Ecology, community and lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by David Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University, 1991), 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Des Jardins, 231.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

vice versa. Aldo Leopold attempts to extend the notion of rights and obligations from humanity to the component parts of ecosystems in order to value the whole. However, this form of ethical holism would be found lacking in social ecology or ecofeminism. Deep ecology emphasizes what it perceives as underlying causes of the ecological crisis, but the tendency for abstract philosophical speculation sometimes avoids more local causes.¹⁰⁶ Both social ecology and ecofeminism share a tendency to search for local, material, political, social, and gender based roots of the ecological crisis.

The land ethic and deep ecology were seen by Murray Bookchin as standpoints that reinforce the barriers of class, politics, and economics that are the roots of the environmental problem. Therefore, according to Bookchin, they are misrepresentative of and downplay humanity's capacity for rational thought, which he believes to be the source of an emergent harmony between humanity and its environment. Bookchin developed an ecophilosophy centered on an alternative programmatic vision for the future that seeks to redress social problems of control and dominance that plague industrialized societies.¹⁰⁷ Addressing the direction humanity needs to take, Bookchin asserts that "[humanity having been] divided from nature many millennia ago . . . must now return to a new unity between the social and the natural that preserves the gains achieved by social and natural history. Thus the *real* history of humanity (which Marx contrasted to the irrational "prehistory" prior to a communistic future) must be wedded to natural history."¹⁰⁸ Although Bookchin sees hierarchal structures as endemic due to the cause of environmental destruction, he breaks from Marx and philosophical anarchism to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 239.

¹⁰⁸ Murray Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society* (Montréal: Black Rose, 1980), 26-7.

conclude that the structure of dominance is a form of consciousness that the individual willingly perpetuates.¹⁰⁹ True freedom can only be attained by a rational, humanistic understanding of humanity's real nature and history in such a fashion that all forms of dominance, both human over human and human over nature are eliminated.¹¹⁰

In the vein of social ecology, ecofeminism utilizes an analytical approach to social phenomena to develop a philosophical and ethical position toward the environment, but the conclusions reached by ecofeminism generally hold that there is a symbolic, historical, and theoretical connection between humanity's domination of nature and society's domination of women.¹¹¹ Just as there are many forms of feminism, thus making it a difficult matter to generally describe feminism as a branch of thought, there are variations of ecofeminism. However, since 1974 there are currently two recurring streams of thought. One is that there are distinctly feminine ways of viewing, understanding and perceiving the world, and that the domination of nature by human society is thus a reflection of the domination of women by men. In this view women are seen as "closer to nature" than men, and as a result one goal of misogynist hierarchies is to stymie his close connection for fear of its strangeness.¹¹²

The other view tends to eschew this interpretation for fear of reinforcing the very sorts of hierarchies and misconceptions about gender that feminism seeks to undo as a system of thought. In this perspective, put forth by the critics Plumwood and Warren, that the problem lies not in a fear of womanhood but in dualisms and essentialisms

¹⁰⁹ Des Jardins, 243.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 254.

inherent in Western society.¹¹³ This sort of ecofeminism challenges environmentalists and feminists alike to find alternative ways of approaching the world that due to reinforce systems of value through distinctions, which this vein of thought sees as the critical element of environmental destruction.

4. Buddhism and Environmental Ethics

Buddhist practitioners, both lay and ordained, environmental activists, and academics have been turning to sundry Buddhist traditions as a resource for conceiving of ethical positions toward the environment and as a conceptual framework for viewing nature since the 1960s.¹¹⁴ There has been no definitive Buddhist outlook to approach ecology and environmental philosophy; respective Buddhist traditions including Tibetan, Japanese, American, Thai, Indian, and Chinese, have varied according to the historical and cultural context from which they emerged.¹¹⁵ Buddhist answers to environmental concerns, hence, may have been more suited to specific problems in specific cultures because the historical, religious, and philosophical matrix out of which that particular Buddhist viewpoint developed meets criteria that fit the needs of those areas.¹¹⁶ However,

¹¹³ Ibid., 255.

¹¹⁴ Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, ed., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, with a preface by Lawrence E. Sullivan, foreword by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, and an introduction by Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997), xxxv.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Examples include: a campaign led by Buddhist priest in Tokyo to save an urban forest from residential development by erecting a large sign declaring that trees possess “Buddha-nature,” the “ordination” of trees by Thai monks to prevent foresting,

it should be possible to develop a less relativistic point of view toward the environment through a Buddhist orientation.

Buddhist thought not only seeks to redress the relations between humanity and nature but between binary opposites in general. Western science's approach to natural phenomena is to attempt to resolve paired oppositions by analyzing their component parts and identifying the manner by which perceived opposites function in larger systems,¹¹⁷ as happens in ecology. David J. Kalupahana, a seasoned intellectual historian of Buddhist philosophy and thought, points out that this scientific-materialist approach is steeped in the common Western presumption that science is wholly unbiased and objective; as such scientific knowledge possesses enough authority to be the ground from which to "openly claim that nonhuman nature has no value at all."¹¹⁸ According to Kalupahana, Buddhist philosophy rectifies dualism thusly:

The philosophical middle path enunciated by the Buddha judiciously avoids the notions of substantial existence and holistic nonexistence in favor of an empirical explanation of the notions of arising and ceasing depending upon causalities. In other words, the conception of paired opposites is retained, not reified. For the Buddha, abstract conceptions of masculin-*ity* and feminin-*ity*, light-*ness* and dark-*ness*, positiv-*ity* and negativ-*ity*, and so on, have no meaning except in the context of the empirical events or phenomena conceptualized as man and woman, day and night, positive and negative, and so forth.¹¹⁹

Thus, in a Buddhist approximation of the relationship between humanity and nature, both humans and nature itself are codependent on one another for distinction. Relations with the environment from a Buddhist point of view are characterized by following a middle

¹¹⁷ David J. Kalupahana, "Toward a Middle Path of Survival," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany, NY: State University of New York), 247.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 249-50.

path between the extremes of humanity's egoic needs from the environment and the sanctity of the environment itself.

An example of such a relationship is one that takes place aesthetically. Japanese Zen Buddhism has been analyzed as a source for environmental ethics, but what emerges surprisingly is that rather than a new ethic a look at certain Zen experiences, such as *satori* experiences expressed through Zen painting, gardening, and poetry, contains aesthetic analogues with ecology rather than ethical ones.¹²⁰ Rather than an ethical unity with nature based on rights and obligations, this sort of experience possesses the potential, for a direct experiential unity with nature through aesthetics. However, Callicott has pointed out that this possibility must be taken with a grain of salt in that this interpretation of the Zen experience of nature may be a romanticized Western view that fails to take into account the Japanese appreciation for cultural transformations and natural purification, as is often found in Shintō ritual.¹²¹ Nevertheless, various Buddhist schools of thought continue to be explored as a philosophical and religious resource for conceiving of ways to frame humanity's interaction with nature.

¹²⁰ J. Baird Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australia Outback* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 101-2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

IV. WATSUJI'S PHILOSOPHY AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

An application of Watsuji's thought to humanity's relationship to nature must be premised on an analysis of the two core pillars of Watsuji's system. Both *Climate and Culture* and *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan* provide a sound foundation for extrapolating a unique perspective on humanity's moral relatedness to its environment. Watsuji's conception of the double structure of personhood extends ethics beyond a subjective set of moral determinations made by an individual. The ramification of this is that Watsuji's ethical system is not an abstract code of morals aimed at creating values to guide relations between individuals. Morals and ethics, rather, evolve out of a negative dialectic in which conscience is the emergence or unfolding of ethical determinations from a primary total emptiness that lies at the heart of the relation between individuals and social groups.¹²² This dialectic can be expanded to include the relationship between humanity and the environment as well as between individuals and society.

¹²² Key to Watsuji's conception of emptiness is what he identifies as the base source of totality. Watsuji places totality in fields of relation; the highest of which he considered to be the state. This conclusion, moreover, holds that even though ethics emerges from the dialectical interchange between individuals and social groups the foundation of morality is to be found in the whole. Watsuji determines, "Human existence is not only the movement of negation between individual and the whole; it must also be the recovery of the concrete totality through countless individuals who stand in mutual opposition by way of a division self and others." Watsuji's ultimate conclusion is that concrete moral conscience is to be found in the highest relational field of human action which he connotes with the cultural nation or state. The flaw in this reasoning is that through the first stage of dialectal negation in this structure, in which the individual emerges through negating the group, generates the egoity that Watsuji criticizes as the Western point of departure for ethical reasoning. If totality is viewed as moving in the opposite direction,

Correspondingly, the idea of *fūdo* addresses the formative impact of nature upon the climatic/cultural manifestations of humanity's spatial niche within the natural world. Watsuji's conception of climate outlines a unity of human action that places this activity within an extended field of relatedness that incorporates human subjectivity with its environment.¹²³ Humanity's awareness of its dual nature as individual and social is apprehended through interaction with the natural world; the interconnectivity of human culture and nature is the heart of that which Watsuji conceives of as *fūdo*.¹²⁴ Watsuji's conception of climate is foundational for the development of an applied environmental ethic based on Watsuji's system because the manner in which climate affects human perception impacts not only the sense of human moral relation to the environment but human morality in general.

1. Watsuji and the Ontological Impact of Nature

The establishment of an environmental philosophy premised on Watsuji's thought would need to incorporate his ontology, Watsuji's notion of *Being*. He finalizes this branch of his philosophical system with the publication of *Fūdo (Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study)* in 1937. In that work Watsuji evokes the experience of climate:

The feeling of exhilaration on a clear, fine day, of gloom on a day in the rainy

starting with the individual and moving toward a negation by an expansion into transpersonal consciousness, then the difficulties and dangers of domination by the state may be avoided. Watsuji Tetsurō, "The Significance of Ethics as the Study of Man," trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin J. Zavala, in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents* (London: Greenwood, 1998), 273-4.

¹²³ Odin, 351.

¹²⁴ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 8.

season, of vitality when the young green bursts, of gentleness when the spring rain falls, of freshness on a summer morning, of savageness on a day of violent wind and rain – we could run through all the words that haiku uses to denote the season and still not exhaust such climatic burdens. Our life is thus restricted by a climate possessed of a limitless range of states. So not only the past but also climate are imposed on us.¹²⁵

Watsuji's poetic description of existential awareness within nature belies a deep grasp of reality's fundamental composition. Drawing on earlier work pioneered by Nishida Kitarō, Watsuji's evocation of the subjective experience of nature and climate demonstrates an embracing of a cosmology founded on "relational fields" as opposed to static "substantial objects."¹²⁶ In the latter, each object is isolated from one another both causally and relationally as in the ontological skepticism of Western thinkers such as Hume. The idea of relational fields is both affluent with and has been adopted by the ecological sciences in the West which in turn has led to an embracing of Eastern thought by contemporary environmental philosophers.¹²⁷

Using ecology as a means of validating the importance of environmental ethics by stressing the interrelatedness of organisms poses a problem in terms of the distinction between "ought" and "is." Callicott proposes that humanity's inextricable relationship

¹²⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁶ One of Nishida's largest contributions to modern Japanese philosophy is his conception of *basho* (space). In this viewpoint, each spatial/temporal moment in nature is a concentrated point for the whole field suchness. *Engi* (dependent origination), the Buddhist notion of a network of causally related empty moments, is reevaluated by Nishida in this system and Watsuji subsequently adopts it for his ontological analysis of the relationship between humanity and nature. Odin, 350.

¹²⁷ For a thought provoking discussion of this and the impact of the New Physics and New Ecology on environmental metaphysics see J. Baird Callicott, "The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York), 56.

with ecological systems necessitates an understanding of the metaphysical implications of this relationship:

Ecology has made plain to us the fact that we are enfolded, involved, and engaged within the living, terrestrial, environment – i.e., implicated in and implied by it . . . Therefore, ecology also necessarily profoundly alters our understanding of ourselves, severally, and human nature, collectively. From this altered representation of environment, people (personally and collectively), and the relationships in it and between it and ourselves, we may *abstract* certain general conceptual notions.¹²⁸

His purpose is not to suggest that there exists a variety of “A leads to B” type conclusion to be drawn from examinations of ecological science that will produce a sound environmental metaphysics. According to Callicott, an ecological premise will not always produce the same metaphysical result, such that if there is an environmental condition then there is a corresponding substantive metaphysical condition.¹²⁹

Humanity’s understanding of itself has a phenomenological basis in an understanding of its environment. Callicott argues that there is a correlation between the ecological relationships that physically relate humanity to its environment and the metaphysical conceptions that humanity has of itself and the environment.

The metaphysical implications of the environment are important because the state of the environment is the basis for which humanity abstracts its moral and ethical responsibilities toward the environment. Conceptually extending the condition of the environment so that its affect on to humanity’s ethical precepts can be exemplified is at the heart of Watsuji’s conception *Being*. Watsuji states, “Now, the place where a subject is will be a social place, such as an inn, his home, his native village, or the world. In

¹²⁸ Callicott, “The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology,” 51.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

other words, it is some human relationship such as a family, a village, a town, or society.”¹³⁰ In other words, human existence is contextual. The subjective and individual perspective arises from a state of *Being* in which the individual and the social unfold and reveal themselves out of a common field of *aidagara* (betweenness). This conception is affluent with both the ancient Japanese conception of the human/nature relationship in which animate nature is viewed as a unity of *onozukara* (natural spontaneity) and *mizukara* (self spontaneity) and Heidegger’s reevaluation of the Greek notion of *physis*.¹³¹ Steve Odin comments on this affluence in thought: “. . . the Japanese concept of [nature] can be compared to the ancient Greek concept of nature through Heidegger’s uncovering of the original Greek understanding of *physis* as that which presence or unfolds of itself into primordial appearance as openness, unhiddenness, and nonconcealment.”¹³² Thus, self and nature coexist in a shared continuum of reality. When the environment is conceived through Watsuji’s ontology it becomes important to sustain its elements, processes, and interconnections because these constituent parts are the framework for human consciousness.

Assigning value to elements within the environment and how the environment is defined, viewed, understood, and debated involves drawing upon an eclectic range of scientific and philosophical fields.¹³³ In addition, it can be inferred from Callicott’s supposition concerning environmental metaphysics that the ontology, epistemology, and

¹³⁰ Watsuji, “The Significance of Ethics as the Study of Man,” 272.

¹³¹ Odin, 352.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Joseph R. Des Jardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy* (CA: Wadsworth, 1993), 142-3.

ethical philosophy that humans have developed in trying to create environmental philosophy have been affected by the human relationship to the environment. Thus, ecological space interpenetrates human thought and observable changes in the environment reveal how human action interpenetrates ecological space. Ames and Callicott believe, “If indeed there is a convergence of traditional Eastern philosophy and contemporary Western science toward a common understanding of the nature of nature, then the East may help the West express its own new natural philosophy.”¹³⁴ Ultimately, Eastern philosophy is viewed by Callicott as having the potential to express determinations of Western sciences, such as ecology, as an emergent form of natural philosophy. These alternative views of conceiving of reality are the basis for a convergence of Watsuji’s ontology with environmental ethics.

Watsuji addresses three patterns of climate in order to demonstrate the historical and social function of each, the monsoon, the desert, and the meadow. Returning to his explication of the desert climate, he addresses the Japanese conception of *sabaku* (desert) by first making two key distinctions. The first is a philological determination; Watsuji distinguishes the Japanese conception of the word *sabaku* in terms of the available environmental material in Japan that produces the term.¹³⁵ Watsuji follows this by then making a further distinction, this one of a more interpretive/analytical bent. Watsuji stresses that what he is analyzing in terms of the impact of *sabaku* is not the abstract point of view in which the desert is analyzed as an empirical object free of human

¹³⁴ J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, “Introduction: The Asian Traditions as Conceptual Resource for Environmental Philosophy,” in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Calliott and Roger T. Ames (New York: SUNY, 1989), 17.

¹³⁵ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 40.

interference. Watsuji is analyzing the desert, rather, as a social and historical state of humanity.¹³⁶ However, does this mean that Watsuji is in effect analyzing the physical impact of the desert climate upon *Being* or is desert being conceived of in a different fashion?

The significance of *fūdo* in this instance is not one of a directly causal nature. Watsuji's focus is not on the abstract manner in which climatic influences cause certain developments and reactions in human society. Rather, Watsuji seeks "to clarify the historical and social function of the desert – this being the basic sphere of such abstraction."¹³⁷ To Watsuji, the importance of climate is in the ontological means by which human beings are able to come face to face with her or his natures. He explicates, "But man is not always the one to understand himself best. His awakening to himself is usually [realised] through the agency of another. This being so, awareness of himself might perhaps be most forcefully effected in the case of the man of the desert if he were exposed to a long and steady downpour of rain."¹³⁸ Here is a clear manifestation of the uncovering, nonconcealment, or coming forth of *Being* discussed previously. Through the self-recognition that occurs in nature, human beings are able to become aware of their state as a social/individual unity that is also a unity of what is human, *Being*, with nature.

It is of note that Watsuji determines that the man of the desert becomes aware of his authenticity by a most un-desert like experience of being soaked in the rain. Through the exposure to the unfamiliar, Watsuji's example, the man of the desert, becomes aware of his own socio-climatic character. Watsuji, in turn, had experiences similar to this in

¹³⁶ Ibid., 40-1.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

his travels abroad from 1927 to 1928. The combined experiences of living in a different climate, similar to that of the man of the desert in the rain, and of further exposure to phenomenology by Heidegger furthered his growing understanding of the environmental character of humanity. His experiences in Europe stokes something of the romantic in him, and Watsuji concludes that since humanity “does not exist in spatial isolation, the environment is an integral part of his subjectivity.”¹³⁹ Awareness of the familiar is stoked by experience of the unfamiliar. Human beings do not exist in abstracted separateness from the environment. The scientific, objective appraisal of the environment is not what Watsuji would consider climate but rather an abstraction created by humanity’s phenomenological relation to nature. Science’s apprehension of nature is, thus, an awareness of what is natural rather than an awareness of nature itself.

Human beings experience nature not as something static but as an active process that is the very foundation of perception. Throughout *Climate and Culture*, Watsuji utilizes architecture and art as examples of cultural products that are the results of the systematic dynamic between human beings and the natural world. Watsuji says of the artist: “It is because his experience contains the order within nature that the artist is moved by the order in his experience.”¹⁴⁰ When creating, artists draw on an interpenetration of his or her own nature with that of his or her environment. These experiences are channeled outwards through creation and the visible, tactile manifestations of culture are produced. However, these manifestations are not just limited to fine art and architecture for to do so would be to isolate these as an abstraction

¹³⁹ Christopher S. Jones, “Politicizing Travel and Climatizing Philosophy: Watsuji, Montesquieu, and the European Tour,” *Japan Forum* 1 (March 2002): 50.

¹⁴⁰ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 205-6.

in a fashion that Watsuji had previously criticized. All human action, creation, and activity can be inferred as a resultant product of and can be contained within the setting of the natural dynamic of *fūdo*. Such an expansive comprehension of this concept would also incorporate the negative and bad elements of human cultures as well and such an understanding would mean that these too are the products of the unfolding of human experience in the natural world. It is because of the potential harm that can come of humanity's interpenetration with these negative elements that an ethics of *fūdo* must be created.

Climate, as characterized by Watsuji, presents a model of human involvement with the environment that creates a cyclical pattern of interaction. Human beings become aware of what they are through experience in a constantly unfolding spatial reality. This spatiality at its most fundamental is the natural world. The results of this self-apprehension are the visible artifacts, development, technology, and character of human cultures. The ethical dimension of the relationality of *fūdo* comes into play because of the role that humanity plays in its own natural matrix. Humans are a part of natural reality, and, as such, the impact of human development as a result of the self-apprehension experienced through *fūdo* becomes clearly visible. After damaging the natural world through over zealous use of it, humans undergo the process of self-apprehension of *fūdo* in an environment that bears the scars of human interaction with it.

This experience creates a shock similar to that of the man of the desert in the rain or Watsuji's travel experience, and it becomes possible for humans to disregard ethical treatment of the environment as necessary because it is already damaged to the point of becoming something unworthy of care. Ultimately, the importance of establishing a

sense of ethical obligation toward the environment, even at the cost of future human development, becomes important because of the form that human development may take if it unfolds from a matrix marred by human misuse. The forms of human culture that arise from a poor climate may in turn have a negative impact on relations between human beings let alone between human beings as a whole and the environment. Therefore, Watsuji's notion of *fūdo* establishes the manner in which humanity relates to the environment and the fundamental importance of why an ethical basis for relating to it is necessary. However, this alone does not develop the manner in which that ethics can take place. For that it is necessary to turn to the second pillar of Watsuji's system.

2. Humanity, the Environment, and Double Negation

Humanity exists as a species interconnected to other organisms through vast fields of causal chains. Appraising the environment from the standpoint of ethics involves, among other considerations, the determination of what obligations human beings have toward the natural world of which humans are a part. Prior to identifying an environmental ethic premised on these obligations it is necessary to determine the form in which they take place. *Fūdo* is the unified field of humanity's environment and its culture. The direction and action of these cultures, however, have to be determined in reference to the ethical processes by which human beings evaluate the environment. As humans experience and are part of the environment on both individual and social levels, a thorough environmental ethic should determine right and wrong action regarding the environment by addressing both the individual and social levels of causal relation to the

environment. Watsuji's idea of *ningen sonzai*, thus, is a viable framework for conceiving of environmental ethics.

Before continuing, it may be helpful to further clarify the character of Watsuji's ethical system. Watsuji's ethics do not have the form of a deontological system. Watsuji's belief that ethics evolve out of the interplay of social relationships would not allow for such rigidity. However, this does not mean that ethics in Watsuji's system is a matter of solipsism or relativity. In Watsuji's system rules and morals are not universal concepts that exist in a realm of ideas to which human action either measures up to or fall short. Watsuji must reject this conception offhand due to the nature in which his philosophy redresses the conceptual immutability of the individual in human history.¹⁴¹

Watsuji conceives of the individual as an entity that only arises from and in opposition to a social context. Watsuji affirms this by describing the Japanese family:

Consequently, it becomes necessary to conceive of a family as one organism. Although the family as a whole depends on its members, it is not merely the sum totally of them but an organic system as well. Here the whole prescribes that each of its members be as they are. Individual members exist only because the whole manifests itself through its parts. Therefore, the family as a whole is to be thought of as an agent that, by manifesting itself in and through its individual members, brings them to unity.¹⁴²

Hence, social groups and individuals are mutually constitutive of one another. The individual is as it is because of its definition by being a cellular component of a larger social organism. An ethics based on virtue or fixed principles would require a self-

¹⁴¹ Ibid., *Rinrigaku: Ethics as the Study of Man*, 84.

¹⁴² Although, here and elsewhere, Watsuji utilizes the metaphor of an organism, and the manner in which its organ and cellular systems interact to form a whole, Watsuji rejects the notion that all of humanity is constitutive of a gigantic, all inclusive super-organism. The analogy serves to demonstrate how the interaction between individuals and society create a whole individual, a person whose individuality is composed of a layering of social and cultural influences. Ibid., 89.

contained and isolated ego that evaluates and weighs moral decisions as a single consciousness. To Watsuji, the definitional features of an individual require a differing approximation of morality because ethical determinations arise from a formational, dialectal process that is compositional of the human condition rather than principles which are good and bad in-and-of-themselves. Morality, then, becomes a matter of necessity rather than one of obligation.

However, it is at this stage of classifying Watsuji's ethics that certain questions and concerns about relativistic ethics arise. Does an ethical perspective emerging from a unity of individual and social contexts face the danger of being too relative for effective application? If ethics is the emergent result of the dual-structure of *ningen* within cultures that both constitute and define individuals it seems that the morality that develops would be over contextualized. This degree of relative ethics would render moral determinations hollow and dangerous because prevailing social conditions could dominate human action. Peter Singer, ethicist and commentator on a wide range of applied ethics, says of the universal applicability of ethics:

Ethics takes a universal point of view. This does not mean that a particular ethical judgment must be universally applicable. Circumstances alter causes. . . . What it does mean is that in making ethical judgments we go beyond our own likes and dislikes. From an ethical point of view, the fact that it is I who benefit from, say, a more equal distribution of income and you who lose by it, is irrelevant. Ethics requires us to go beyond 'I' and 'you' to the universal law, the [universalisable] judgment, the standpoint of the impartial spectator or ideal observer, or whatever we choose to call it.¹⁴³

Ethics takes on a form that transcends the relative through a cultivation of the proper perspective necessary to make sound ethical judgment. According to Watsuji, ethics is a process. Rather than the Kantian reliance on the categorical imperative to generate

¹⁴³ Singer, 11-2.

ethical decisions based on their universal applicability in every situation in which the moral issue arises, Watsuji stresses a different type of universality. Watsuji's universalism does not stress an ethics that seek to define good action by that which is good in all cases throughout time and space.

Rather than a series of rights and obligations, this standpoint would rely on ontological necessities that both individuals and social groups have in relation to the environment. Thus, individual elements in the environment have a stable inherent worth. Also, Watsuji's ethics is not based on consequentialist reasoning. The right and the wrong are not gauged by a pre-existing set of verifiable standards that lead to the greatest good for the greatest number, as in the utilitarian perspective. Watsuji's ethics neither purport a relativistic or a union of means with ends. Because Watsuji's ethics emerges from the field of *aidagara*, it could be derived that ethics will take whatever form human beings happen to be interacting at any given moment in history. As long as there exists the social bonds that unite people to one another through their relationships, ethics will emerge from this dynamic.

An environmental ethic premised on *ningen sonzai* rests on the possible externalization of the subject into the objective world. Humanity's characteristic tension of simultaneous individual and social existence is the basis for conceiving of space and environment. Watsuji theorizes, "Subjective extendedness, which is inherent in the activities of *ningen*, is exactly the characteristic of spatiality of *ningen sonzai* from which originates all other kinds of space. This extendedness is a 'tension' within the interconnection of the acts of subjects, which changes its strength and degree of

inclusiveness in accordance with the multiplicity of and unifying of subjects.”¹⁴⁴ Space, thus, is composed of the dependent space of human subjective experience that creates a unified social reality. The spatiality of the subject “is the primordial element through which things can be found as objects.”¹⁴⁵ From this, Watsuji concludes that naturally occurring objects such as trees, grasses, mountains and rivers contain the primitive elements that compose the spatiality of the subject. If these natural elements are key components by which the subjectivity of *ningen* encounters the world relationally, then the condition of the environment is of direct concern to Watsuji because the natural world is incorporated into the same matrix of *aidagara* that exists between individuals and social groups.

Nature and the environment are ontologically grounded in the consciousness of *ningen* through the negative structure that is fundamental to Watsuji’s ethical system. Watsuji infers that there is both an individual and social sense of spatiality, and there is a resulting shared state of consciousness at the ground of both fields of negation. On the issue of the negative structure of space, Watsuji comments:

The negation of subjective spatiality, that is, the standpoint of the individual, establishes these sorts of space. In spite of this, the origin of space lies in the ‘betweenness’ of subjects, that contradicts the standpoint of the individual. Then, through the negation of this latter standpoint, perspective disappears and homogeneous space arises. This homogeneous space is the abstraction of subjective space carried to its extreme. At issue here is the natural world, which arises in an intersubjective way; and hence it arises within consciousness in general.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Watsuji, *Rinrigaku: Ethics as the Study of Man*, 177.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 178-9.

The ultimate consciousness of the natural world begins with the negation of the purely subjective experience of spatial reality. Next, the consciousness of space as a shared sense between multiple subjects is negated to reach a conception of the natural world that is absolute because it is not dependent on subjective experience or social reality. This is the fundamental field out of which general consciousness of the environment arises. Ethics in regards to nature, therefore, must address it as this ultimate reality. Because Watsuji claims that ethics is the resultant development of humanity's dual-structure, what then is to differentiate the quality of ethics in *ningen sonzai*? Are the ethics that emerge from some dialectal relations and interconnected groups superior to others?

Absolute apprehension of the environment as a means to developing an environmental ethic requires an appreciation of nature on each level of the negative dialectic that composes *ningen sonzai*. Subjectively, the extension of the interconnectedness of human action into the environment widens the field of relation that individuals experience to go beyond the individual/social dynamic can create a dialectic of individual/nature.¹⁴⁷ This would mean that an ethics of necessity in which the individual cultivates a sense of obligation to the environment based on the dual structure of negativity takes place between a person and nature. However, this model can also be extended for social groups as well. Watsuji says of humanity's fundamental structure: "*Ningen sonzai* consists of the movement through which human beings come back to the original totality through a disruption into self and other, spatially as well as temporally."¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, the individual and social dialectic that exists between humanity and nature are both of marked importance. Determining which dialectic has a

¹⁴⁷ Odin, 351.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 307.

larger impact on the environment is a matter of the scale of the perspective and the approach being used to analyze the relationship.

Watsuji's conception of humanity existing as a dual-structure of concurrent individuality and social connection can be expanded to incorporate the environment within both levels of the dual structural pattern. Extending Watsuji's ethical dialect to incorporate the environment must occur on both portions of the dialectic because to leave out either would be to forego *aidagara* in humanity's dealings with nature. In the formation of a perceptual framework for moral reasoning on the environment, overemphasizing either the individual or the social dimensions carries dangers and biases that Watsuji's concept of *ningen sonzai* can unravel. In order to see how these levels directly apply it will be necessary to compare Watsuji's thought with extant models of environmental philosophy.

3. An Ethics of Climate

Watsuji's philosophy has been shown to be very well suited to the formation of new environmental philosophy, and this philosophy is already affluent with several preexisting ways of conceiving of nature in an ethical or philosophical manner. Key concerns raised by the environmental ethics movement, in general, can be readily addressed. Watsuji's ethics emphasis on act interconnectedness accommodates the debate over how to assign value to nature. Since Watsuji's ontology incorporates nature as part of the individual/social dynamic that is the underpinning unity of his thought, it becomes possible to value nature's intrinsic instrumentality.

Nature, since it is now part of the same dialectic that describes human action and culture, is engaged in the same interplay of negation that occurs between individuals and society. When humanity negates its unity with nature to exercise a need or desire to use goods and resources that nature provides, humanity becomes an emergent presence that unfolds from the natural world in a manner akin to which the individual discloses itself in opposition to social context. As creatures within a network of ecological chains, human beings are not solely defined by his or her actions but by the range of relations the compose humanity within nature. This first stage of negation is a an instrumental means of viewing the environment as it attempts to incorporate an attitude of wise use so that nature's value can be taken advantage of in the future.

In the second negation, the negation of the negation, human beings experience the fundamental unified consciousness of being emergent with the natural totality. *Fūdo*'s emphasis on the unity of human culture with the condition of the natural world is felt most keenly during this stage. As a result, nature is both simultaneously viewed by Watsuji's system as intrinsic and instrumental. It is intrinsic in that climate, the environment, is part of an expansive series of relational fields that include humanity and is to be valued inherently because of its place within this system. Nature serves an instrumental source beyond how it is used by humans directly for shelter, food, power, clothing, and tools because *fūdo* is the natural spatial field out of which these elements emerge. Therefore, intrinsic instrumentality is the ethical condition of a structure of double negativity in which human action toward and in response to the environment takes place.

This model bears an affinity with several systems of environmental ethics. Arne Næss's theories of deep ecology stress both valuing nature intrinsically as a gestalt whole¹⁴⁹ and extending the ego through self-realizing the individual in nature.¹⁵⁰ Watsuji's system has a similar tendency toward expanding and extending fields of ethics to include the environment. However, the intention of and basis for this extension differs from the self-realization encouraged by Næss. Næss's paradigm of Self-realization encourages a personally cultivated relationship with nature that is not self-centered but does not involve the dissolution of the ego into the larger world. Altruism becomes necessary in an ideal world defined by potentiality and an attempt to increase the Self-realization of other beings.¹⁵¹ This is similar to the bodhisattva element of Mahayana Buddhism in which some beings forego enlightenment in order to assist others until there are no longer beings who suffer.

Even though, Watsuji's system shares some of these elements it is fundamentally incongruous with Næss's in that Watsuji's system is premised on the essential unreality of the ego as a Western philosophical/religious convention. While Watsuji would approve of the attempt to expand consciousness beyond merely the personal, the ultimate foundation for this awareness of the gestalt is the heightened perception of the self and its ability to interact in a larger ecological context. Also, an environmental ethic conceived through Watsuji's system is far more descriptive than it is normative. The dual structure of human relations and the historical aspects of *fūdo* are not progressive elements. The temporal dimension in Watsuji's system is akin to the spatial and emphasizes a unified

¹⁴⁹ Næss, 10-11.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

simultaneity that is at odds with Næss's system based on stages and steps of personal growth and connectivity with the environment.

The social ecology and ecofeminism movements are also ill-suited for compatibility with Watsuji's model. Both are concerned with pinpointing the cause of the ecological crisis not in thought but in underlying social and hierarchical values that encourage dominance of the environment in a manner akin to which different social classes and genders within human societies dominate one another. Watsuji's thought does not advocate the radical societal change that social ecologists and ecofeminists feel would be necessary to redress the issues plaguing humanity's relations to its environment. The niche within environmental philosophy that Watsuji's system would carve for itself would have to be premised on elements that are affluent with the two core pillars of his thought. Therefore, comparing the land ethic of Aldo Leopold and comparative insights made between environmental ethics and Buddhist philosophy would be the most revealing in terms of viewing Watsuji's thought in a comparative light.

V. A COMPARISON OF WATSUJI'S ETHICS OF CLIMATE TO ALDO LEOPOLD'S LAND ETHIC

An environmental ethic interpolated from Watsuji's system requires nuances that address the ontological experience of nature and the dynamic of ethics emerging from the unity of individual and self. Interweaving the threads of Watsuji's system, thus, necessitates an analysis of both the space of action and the manner in which humanity responds to it. Judging the validity of such an interpretation can be achieved by comparing the environmental philosophy derived from Watsuji's system to that of an established branch of environmental thought.

The land ethic of Aldo Leopold (1887 – 1948) resonates well with Watsuji's system. Although culturally divergent, both writers lived in relatively the same historical period and thus faced issues that were universally relevant for the time. Leopold suggests that over time humanity, with few setbacks, has gradually extended its ethics to become more and more inclusive as it has become increasingly aware.¹⁵² New insights sparked by the development of ecological science inspired Leopold to conclude that humanity has an obligation to the natural world similar to the obligation that is born toward other human beings. The privilege of enjoying the natural world should rest on humanity's acceptance of equity in this relationship and responsibilities that accompany it.

Leopold's commentary and Watsuji's philosophy are affluent through similarities in conclusions concerning how the natural environment has shaped the form of human

¹⁵² Leopold, 201-2.

culture and how this relationship influences ethics. Steve Odin has commented upon this relationship, “Watsuji’s ethical philosophy is, therefore, one of the most suggestive resources for environmental ethics as outlined by Aldo Leopold, in which morality is enlarged so as to include not simply individual/individual and individual/social relations, but also the encompassing human/nature relation as a major extension of practical ethics.”¹⁵³ Proper care for the environment emerges out of a positive experience of the environment. The latter is resultant form the aesthetic relationship between interplay of natural spontaneity and self spontaneity. However, when addressing Watsuji’s work in terms of aesthetics questions and concerns of cultural particularism arise. These can be redressed by Buddhist elements in his theory that can serve to universalize his ethical principles through a comparison with Aldo Leopold’s.

1. Perception as Action

The experience of nature must be analyzed as both an individual and social activity. When accumulated individual experience of the natural world is discussed and shared it becomes collective, and a general attitude toward the environment is formed by human societies. For example, the choice of littering on a public street is an individual choice that is colored by the sentiment the individual feels toward the space in which the littering is about to occur; if there is already litter on the ground, or the area has been defaced in some other way, there is far less moral weight placed on the space collectively and thus the decision to go ahead and dispose of trash at leisure becomes easier. This

¹⁵³ Steve Odin, “The Japanese Concept of Nature and Aldo Leopold,” in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997), 95.

example demonstrates that perception can come to have the same force as action. Since ontological space and social groups are a unity as in *fūdo*, the climatic conception of an environmental space directly impacts the actions taken by individuals.

Aldo Leopold argues that private ethical sentiment toward the environment is founded on the social sense of how humans have their interests invested in the land. Human use of the land, according to Leopold, is governed by economic self-interest. Communities and their needs treat the environment in a consequentialist fashion, treating the environment in such a manner that it becomes a means to end.¹⁵⁴ The end in this case is human betterment and happiness with no consideration for extending the rights and privileges that human beings feel they have to any of the other organisms within the ecological systems that humans exploit. Leopold writes, “The evolution of a land ethic is an intellectual as well as emotional process. . . . I think it is a truism that as the ethical frontier advances from the individual to the community, its intellectual content increases.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, in order for human beings to change how the environment is treated, people must alter their view of what the environment consists of and what it is. This is a process that moves from the individual intellect outwards, and it eventually allows for an alteration of the rather emotional esteem in which the environment is held by societies at large.

Watsuji’s viewpoint of the social apprehension of the environment is similar. However, rather than couching the experience human groups have of the environment as emotional, Watsuji views it as aesthetic. In *Climate and Culture*, Watsuji continuously purports that humanity’s apprehension of itself in climate is a historical phenomenon.

¹⁵⁴ Leopold, 208.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

Trends and aspects of human culture develop in climatic unity with the environment and thereby creating the sense of climate that individual human beings possess.

One difficulty presented by Watsuji's understanding is the applicability of Watsuji's view of climate beyond Japan. Watsuji's discussion of the Japanese Spirit and Japanese national character often involves aesthetics. He cites that Japan's unique identity is derived in part from its aesthetic sensibility.¹⁵⁶ Even though Japan's aesthetics are a distinguishing feature of its *Weltanschauung*, this does not necessarily entail a political connection. Nevertheless, Watsuji's aesthetics, when viewed in conjunction with his collusion with the Japanese government during the War years,¹⁵⁷ suggests the need for a closer scrutiny of the possible particularistic implications of these aesthetics especially in light of his conclusions on the relationship between climate and human culture. Climate's aesthetic impact is critical as well. In terms of Watsuji's writing on climate and on the nature aesthetics of ancient Japan, the manner in which a society reflects on nature and humanity's relationship to it is to a degree indicative of that society's national character. Watsuji-thought has potential for the development and advancement of environmental philosophy.

Like Heidegger, Watsuji's thought has come under close scrutiny due to the willing support he offered to and production of propaganda for Japan's wartime

¹⁵⁶ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, 206-7.

¹⁵⁷ For an example of the philosophical propaganda that Watsuji produced during the war years see: Ibid., "The Japanese Spirit," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, ed. and trans. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin Jacinto Zavala (London: Greenwood, 1998), 231-61.

government during the Shōwa period suggests that Watsuji's ethical principles require close scrutiny.¹⁵⁸ Robert Bellah explicates this character of Watsuji's philosophy:

He attacks the so-called world religions for claiming a false universalism and praises the close union of culture and group in Japan as expressive of the true and proper relationship. Similarly, Watsuji attacks the notion of an abstract individual. All individuals are members of groups and take on real meaning only when seen as such. The ideal situation is one in which culture, group, and individual are fused organically into a single body a *gemeinschaft* (*kyōdōtai*) The most adequate and comprehensive *kyōdōtai* is the state, expressed most fully when embodied in the Japanese emperor who expresses in a mediate way, the only possible way, absolute value. This conception is. . . . neither doctrinaire nor narrow minded. The Japanese emperor system can serve as a protective umbrella for all the world's culture, taking it up and utilizing it as long as it is willing to remain in its properly subordinate role.¹⁵⁹

To Bellah, Watsuji's conception of the interaction between individuals and social groups hinges on the figure of the Japanese emperor. Watsuji has rejected the immutability of the abstract individual and in its place suggests that the individual only truly gains its identity in the context of a social absolute. Like many thinkers in the academic establishment of his generation Watsuji places this absolute in the form of the emperor who is the locus of the interconnectivity of the highest expression of community, the state. This concept is the most limiting feature of Watsuji's thought when it comes to extending it beyond the Japanese context.

The other difficulty of an environmental ethic centered on Watsuji taking the form of a land ethic would lie in the dimension of perseveration. For Leopold, humanity's realization of its need to respect the environment as it has become to respect other human beings and different human social groups involves a form of natural conservation. Preservation implies cutting off a part of the natural environment to protect it from

¹⁵⁸ Bellah, 579.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 592.

human interference and exploitation in order to maintain its aesthetic or intrinsic value. However, if nature is viewed as a continuous ecological system of which humanity is a part then everything in nature is natural. Sectioning off some parts of the Natural environment unaffected by human action and declaring that they are pure because of this is incongruous with Watsuji's thought. The idea of pure nature and the value of this nature being in its purity are also reflected in Japanese religion, art, and culture. Shinto and Japanese Buddhism, while exalting nature in ritual and thought, love different aspects of nature than does the aesthetics of the West.¹⁶⁰ Callicott suggests: "The contemporary environmentalist see one 'nature' in Japan- forested mountains and traditionally husbanded alluvial valleys, together forming a fairly healthy, functioning ecosystem- while 'nature' so venerated in traditional Japanese art, religion, and philosophy is small in scale, cultivated, abstract, and stylized."¹⁶¹ Thus, Shinto and Buddhism see in the natural world the potential to revere a changing culture through purifications of a transient world in decay. This idea is reflected in the appreciation of the momentary and suchness as in *mono no aware*.

Thus, an environmental philosophy based on Watsuji's notion of aesthetics may be applicable to Japanese environmental concerns over preservation, but for Western aesthetics this form of environmental ethics is incongruous due to the difference in aesthetic approaches to the natural world. Ethics with a close relationship to or steeped in aesthetics may be applicable to Japanese society, but Western culture may require a more rational system for why the environment must be valued and treated accordingly.

¹⁶⁰ Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australia Outback*, 104.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 104-5.

Nevertheless, Watsuji's philosophy is still applicable to environmental ethics in terms of his views on the part-whole relationship expressed in his treatise on Japanese ethical theory. Leopold's conception of the individual conscience being the starting place of any effective environmental ethic is a sound inclusion to an environmental philosophy based on Watsuji's thought.

2. Humanity's Technological Interpenetration with Natural Space

In order to alter the reaction of individuals to the environment, it is crucial to analyze and reevaluate the primary manner in which human social units interact with the land. Leopold characterizes humanity's pattern of behavior thusly: "*Homo sapiens* puts no under his own vine and fig tree; he has poured into his tank the stored motivity of countless creatures aspiring through the ages to wiggle their way to pastures new. Ant-like he swarms the continents."¹⁶² If the individual relationship with the environment is founded on emotion, pleasure, and aesthetics, humanity as a whole has most profoundly affected the environment through the application of technological development. Technology has extended the capability of human beings to physically interact with nature and take what they need from it. However, this social force has not generally been accompanied by an ethical factor that curbs its use in the interest of the land and organic systems that are the source of this technological expansion.

Watsuji places technological innovation in a social context. Watsuji criticizes Heidegger for presupposing the primacy of the individual existence without social

¹⁶² Leopold, 166.

structure.¹⁶³ Thus, Heidegger's emphasis on tools in his ontology misses the more fundamental level of social reality. Watsuji argues that tools and their uses are socially determined thus the key focus should not be on the ego or individual that uses the tool but rather on the social environment that creates the need for the tool in the first place. Therefore, technology develops out of an interrelated system.

The negative structure of *ningen sonzai* has no parallel in Leopold's thought, but the dual structure of human ethics can be utilized to demonstrate how individual human beings can fundamentally alter the manner in which humanity interacts with the environment. Commenting on the land's impact on human development, Leopold comments:

That man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and the land. The characteristics of the land determined the facts quite as potently as the characteristics of the men who lived on it.¹⁶⁴

Leopold's discussion of the mechanization and commodification of hunting is relevant in the context of Watsuji's description of the phenomenological development of technology. To Leopold, advances in hunting that oversimplify the experience and make it an everyday occurrence, with maximum convenience and minimal expenditure of effort, bring the factory environment "to the land."¹⁶⁵ Technology eases and familiarizes the hunting experience to such an extent that it is industrial in nature. Wilderness has just become another juncture of the industrial process.

¹⁶³ Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, 176.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁶⁵ Leopold, 181.

To put this in Watsuji's terms, the environment has created the ontological context out of which certain tools develop to take advantage of its bounty. Farmers require tools such as plows and threshers. These tools develop because there are environmental conditions that necessitate their use, arable land and a hungry population. In the dialect between humanity and the environment, the negative dialectic only enters the first stage. Human beings negate the needs of the natural world in order to suit their ends.

The ramification of only going half-way with the dialect is that humanity, as an individual species in a biotic community, comes to act with destructive egoism. The implications of this are striking when seen in light of Watsuji's claim:

Thus climate is seen to be the factor by which self-active human beings can be made objective: climatic phenomena show man how to discover himself as 'standing outside' . . . The self discovered by the cold turns into tools devised against the cold, such as houses or clothes, which then confront the self. Again climate itself, the climate in which we move, and in which 'we stand outside,' becomes a tool to be used.¹⁶⁶

From Watsuji's perspective, human beings are engaged in a process of self-apprehension in regards to the environment. Humans as a social entity discover their needs, desires, and condition through the environment as an ontological medium. This becomes the context out of which human technology develops.

Seeing this in terms of Leopold's concern, human beings, through what amounts to a possible overuse of technology, are ceasing to apprehend themselves in the environment. Rather, humans are engaged in a process of phenomenological apprehension whose egoism is exemplified through the act of bringing a mentality generated by omnipresent industry to relating to the land. Leopold states, "To sum up,

¹⁶⁶ Watsuji, *Climate and Culture*, 12-3.

wildlife once fed us and shaped our culture. It still yields us pleasure for leisure hours, but we try to reap that pleasure by modern machinery and thus destroy part of its value. Reaping it by modern mentality would yield not only pleasure but wisdom as well.”¹⁶⁷ The natural world is no longer the determining ontological matrix out of which humanity infers its condition. Technology has enabled human beings to fundamentally alter nature and thus the matrix is humanity/nature but humanity/altered-nature.

A breakdown in Watsuji’s ontology has occurred. No longer are people merely responding to the presence of climate by becoming aware of their condition in that climate and thus innovating cultural artifacts to compensate. Industrialization has created a scenario in which human culture is apprehending not a pure climate or environment distinct from its own influence and thus responding in kind but rather an environment of humanity’s own creation. Technology has enabled human societies to proceed beyond mere response to the environment and its challenges but has enabled it to change that climate. What is the potential ontological impact of such a trend? Do either Watsuji’s or Leopold’s ethics leave room for humanity to maneuver away from this trend or to rectify it?

3. Ecology and Intuition

As a species, humanity has come to act with the egoism of an individual in its all-consuming hunger for expansion and accommodation. This drive and its consequences threaten the very foundation of the body that hungers. Since, humanity and its environment are compositional parts of the same unity to hurt or injure one part damages

¹⁶⁷ Leopold, 187.

the whole. A secure environmental future will require both individuals and social groups to alter the way the environment is experientially encountered, and thus treated.

The impact of ecological science lies in perception. Unblemished nature as it has been experienced in the past is now understood in the present in terms of the underlying intricacies that compose nature. For Leopold this meant a reevaluation of how human beings should approach the land that incorporated an ecological sense of the interrelatedness of natural elements. Soil is not merely soil. Indigenous plants and animals interact with open energy systems that remain healthy so long as there is some balanced attempt to keep the energy systems open. Human beings can drastically affect nature because of these interconnections in a fashion that far exceeds intended consequences.¹⁶⁸ Proper appreciation for the land involves a personal restructuring of the individual viewpoint toward the natural world. Understanding how the environment composes perception and acts as a foundation for ethical thought, thus seeking to experience nature directly, as something injured and suffering, in the interest of saving the foundation of perception becomes the key to preserving the environment and the foundation of working to undo damage done to it.

In order to achieve this end, individuals must complete the social dialectic in relation to the environment that is left unfinished by widespread human use of the environment. This is not to suggest that human beings do something radical as cease using the land at all or come to the point where the land is valued higher than human life. Rather there must be a middle path struck between humanity and the natural environment that acknowledges the needs of human of beings while incorporating a *dharma* regarding

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 218.

the land.¹⁶⁹ If Watsuji's system of negative dialects is applied to this end in the order with which it is presented in his writings then it is bound to fail. For human beings to strike harmony between the land and its needs, it is necessary for individual humans to not seek negation by the social collective but rather in their actual physical reality.

Aldo Leopold argues for an extension of the ethical consideration that humans give to one another to the land. Watsuji's system can achieve this end if human beings actively work toward broadening their perspective from human to human relations to include the environment. Ultimately, the question becomes what means are ethical to instill such a cultivation of perception in human beings? It is ethically pernicious to request that human beings who are already struggling and in dire straits to think less of their own needs and more of the environment in which they live. In response to this concern, it is important to consider that attempting to alter human consciousness regarding the environment in this manner should not forget the needs of human beings as well. For do so is another type of egoism in which the preservation of the environment becomes so abstracted the environment itself or elements within the environment become such a cause of concern that it is forgotten the human beings to do are a part of this vast network and that they as well are deserving of compassionate consideration.

Such an experience should kindle an intuitive awareness of the environment's condition and thus allow the individual to rationally understand what needs to be done in ethical relation to it. Thus, when human beings as a group ontologically apprehend their character, individuals will carry this awareness with them and thus fundamentally alter humanity's collective behavior toward the environment. The absolute is not located in

¹⁶⁹ Kalupahana, 254-5.

the state, but rather, it is that sense of *aidagara* that unites human beings through the natural environment they share. Intuitively grasping this home ground of relation between human beings and the environment generates a consciousness of the environment's condition and provokes an active response. However, cultivating such a perception is an action in and of itself.

VI. CONCLUSION

Watsuji's thought can facilitate the development of an environmental ethic that avoids the pitfalls of synonymously conceiving of "environment" and "nature" as aspects of the world with which humanity interacts but from which it is essentially distinct, as has been the presumption for much of Western intellectual history. His ontology of climate offers a means of understanding the dialectic between humanity and the environment, a dialectic founded on the mutual influence that both humankind and the environment have upon one another. Humanity's relationship with climate must be scrutinized carefully in terms of environmental philosophy. In Watsuji's view, climate is the unity of humanity's cultural reaction to the environment and the environment itself. It is in this dialectic that human beings apprehend his or her needs and conditions. However, it is clear that humanity's actions affect the character of the environment. This being so, what is to be thought of climate if humanity's actions affect its character? If humanity and climate are inextricably interrelated then their impact on one another could be assumed to be mutual. Watsuji views climate's impact as historical, so the actions that human societies take toward one another and the environment are to a degree premised on the outlooks derived from climatic unity that climate and, on the material level, availability of space and resources, produces.

As a species, humanity has come to act with destructive ego centeredness.

Homo sapiens is an individual organism that is a citizen in a vast society of species united in ecological networks that, in turn, can be construed as an ecological society. However,

the individual needs of humanity have instilled in it an unquenchable hunger for consumption and expansion. Human beings, in seeking to utilize the resources provided by its various environments, have come to view those environments as reservoirs of endless bounty or objects that exist merely at the pleasure of humanity for its enjoyment. Humanity's intention to exploit the goods in the environment is not wrong *per se*. However, heedless striving for the products of the environment without due consideration for the matrix of interconnections out of which these products emerge creates a disparity between humanity and the setting of its actions. Thus, *Homo sapiens*, as a species, suffers from the same duality in perception between subject and object that troubles individual members of humankind. The two key elements of Watsuji's philosophical system, climaticity and the ethics of double-negation can be developed into a theory to address these issues, among others.

Fūdo is a conceptual resource for reevaluating the manner in which the environment and human culture mutually impact one another. To Watsuji, climate is more than the sum of measurable meteorological statistics of a region. It is the ontological union of humanity and its environment. Culture, then, is the historical manifestation of this interaction. As such, this union can be appreciated by humanity in the aesthetic reactions that human beings have to her or his environment. These cultural manifestations are unique and particular to regional climatic-historical matrixes. For example, Romantic poetry of early nineteenth century Britain, with its emphasis on the capacity of nature to elicit the imaginative faculties of humans in extension of the self beyond physical restrictions and immediate bodily sensations, is as much a reflection of the British countryside as Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetic sensibility. Also, for

example *haiku* and *waka* compositions on regularly occurring natural motifs, such as plum and cherry trees, are reflections of climate as these short poems express the sense of interrelatedness between human emotions and the natural world in Japan. Both examples express the unique union that climate manifests in each culture.

This pillar of Watsuji's system places responsibility for the environment on the individual. Even though Watsuji's sense of aesthetics and cultural production have both been criticized for a particularism that stresses the uniqueness of Japanese culture, Watsuji's notion of *fūdo* is an excellent resource for individuals to cultivate a sense of individual karmic responsibility to the environment. Right action toward the land should be premised on an appreciation for the environment that is all-encompassing. Watsuji's appreciation for Japan's climate develops out of a comparison of his experiences at home with those of observations he makes while abroad. This example demonstrates that there is a degree to which an aesthetic appreciation of *fūdo* involves negating an egoic sense of climate that is settled only in one's personal experience. Ethical action toward the environment does not necessitate a personal cultivation of reaction toward the land, as in deep ecology. Rather, it involves developing a perception of the environment that incorporates the various manners that other people's and cultures appreciate the land in order to extend the ego beyond individual context. Combining these aesthetic senses can overcome the selfish reasons that humans often use the land because it offers multiple vistas from which the environment can be seen and appreciated. Therefore, when the land is used individuals are aware of the possible interrelation of his or her actions based on a multifaceted perspective that seeks to incorporate others' points of view.

The other pillar of Watsuji's philosophy is centered on a conception of ethics that views morals as developing out of a mutually negating dialect between the individual and the group. According to Watsuji the character of Japanese ethics is not a consequentialist assessment of satisfaction and dissatisfaction nor is it a fixed set of abstract moral principles, Japanese ethics is a fluid dynamic that involves the negation of either the individual or the social. Extending this dynamic between humanity, as an individual species, in a biotic community reveals a similar dialectic. Humans acting either as individuals or groups often negate the integrity of ecological systems in order to take advantage of their resource capacity, and, at times, humanity curbs its activities in acknowledgement of a need to preserve the environment. Like Watsuji's ethics, this approximation is descriptive rather than normative, and only becomes normative in the field of human action.

Although, Watsuji's ethical system has been scrutinized due to his collaboration with the Imperial state during the Shōwa era by commentators such Bellah, Piovesana, Yasuo, and Carter, among others, it would be helpful to further investigate and comment upon this issue. When approaching Watsuji-thought in terms of applied ethics it is crucial to understand the possible ramifications that theory can have on human activity. If the discussion remains purely theoretical, without stopping to consider the concrete ramifications, than it broaches the danger of doing more harm than good. In this vein, an examination of the historical and intellectual climate out of which Watsuji's thought developed can pinpoint the sources that impacted his outlook.

Identifying these sources can in turn lead to discovering their relationship to the history of the interaction between Japan's people to its environment from the late Meiji

era onwards. This understanding will suggest the sort of environmental problems appropriate to an application of Watsuji-philosophy. Ultimately what needs to be considered is that Watsuji's notion of *ningen sonzai* can be extended to not only refer to the absolute negation between the individual and society but between human societies and their respective environments or climates.

Additionally, Watsuji's philosophy has the potential to be explored further from the point of view of applied ethics. Because Watsuji's thought is thoroughly grounded in theory, further dimensions of his thought can only be addressed through application to contemporary issues and concerns. In the last two decades, developments in technology have created a host of ethical concerns that could benefit from a fresh reevaluation from Watsuji's perspective. The impact of highly developed electronic communication, globalization, bioethics, from the standpoint of the human body and health due to new innovations in genetics, and sundry political issues are all examples of problems that through an application of Watsuji's philosophy may have answers waiting and can also serve to validate or dispute many of Watsuji's conclusions.

In terms of explicating Watsuji's thought, there is a wealth of avenues to explore regarding Watsuji's Eastern religious and philosophical influences. In his career, Watsuji comments on a host of cultural and religious traditions, often analyzing them in the context of Japan's developing intellectual culture. Although Watsuji is not widely considered to be a Buddhist thinker in the vein of Nishida Kitarō, the impact of Buddhist thought is clear in much of his writing. A thorough study of Watsuji's Buddhist influences has the potential to deepen an understanding of some of his more nebulous concepts. For while Nishida's system undergoes a rigorous series of evaluations and

critical assessments by his disciples, and thus benefits, Watsuji has no disciples and thus problematic elements of his philosophy are either left unaddressed or underdeveloped. An exegetical return to Watsuji's system with an orientation centered on Buddhist thought could clarify much of his philosophy.

Ultimately, an individual perception of absolute space can lead to a relative conception of social responsibility to the environment. Human action is only as effective and good as the perceptive ground from which it springs forth. The perceptual capacity that human beings possess is conditioned by its environment and context. Therefore, sound ethics founded on an awareness of individual and group needs necessitate a healthy environment. The application of Watsuji's ontological and ethical system to both perceptive faculties as active faculties has the potential to create a ground for action in which humans may not only preserve what is good about the environment but also act to improve its condition or rectify the damage of human misuse.

GLOSSARY

Aidagara – betweenness

Basho – place; space

Fūdo – climate

Kokutai – national pillar

Kominato – large industrial corporation

Kyōdōtai – community

Mizukara – self spontaneity

Ningen – human beings

Ningen sonzai – human being as existence

Onozukara – natural spontaneity

Sabaku – desert

Sonzai – being

Tenka – the world

Tennō – emperor

Zen – goodness

Zen nin – a good person

Zen i – a good will

Zen kō – a good act

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