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# THE COMMUNALITY OF CREATIVITY AND THE CREATIVITY OF COMMUNITY: A COMPARISON OF THE ETHICS OF NIKOLAI BERDYAEV AND WATSUJI TETSURŌ

**Anton Luis Sevilla**  
**Philosophy Department**  
**Ateneo de Manila University**  
**asevilla@gmail.com**

### Abstract

Self-fidelity is a human ethical task. But how can we be faithful to a self that is both individual and social? This paper takes up this question by comparing the basic ethical frameworks of Nikolai Berdyaev and Watsuji Tetsurō. In the first section of this paper, Berdyaev's notion of personality and his three forms of ethics (ethics of law, ethics of redemption, and ethics of creativeness) are discussed. In the second section, Watsuji's notion of ethics as the study of man (*ningen*) is explored, detailing the dual structure of *ningen* and the double-negation of ethics. And in the third section, a detailed comparison is carried out in an attempt to reconcile Berdyaev's individualistic ethics and Watsuji's social ethics, beginning with their notions of the human person, proceeding to their three-part ethical structures, and ending with an exploration of the possibility of unifying their philosophies through a notion of communal creativity and creative community.

### Keywords

Buddhism, Christianity, Japanese philosophy, sociality

### About the author

Anton Luis Sevilla is an Instructor in the Philosophy Department of the Ateneo de Manila University, the Philippines, where he received his MA in Philosophy. He is presently conducting research on Japanese Buddhism as it encounters philosophical systems in both the east and west.

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## INTRODUCTION

One can only be truly ethical if one can embrace and be faithful to what it means to be a human person. But as a human person, one is always at the same time both individual and social, and these two facets exist in irreconcilable tension—a tension that makes ethical life irretrievably complicated. How can one explicate an approach to ethics that does justice to both these irreducible facets?

In this paper, we take up two thinkers: Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev (Николай Александрович Бердяев, 1874-1948) and Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960). No full-fledged comparison between these two thinkers has appeared in the English language. Yet from the point of view of East-West comparative philosophy and Buddhist-Christian studies, Berdyaev and Watsuji make for an interesting comparison for while their life experiences and philosophical systems are alike in so many ways, they walked similar paths in philosophy and life in remarkably different ways. This results in a very productive similarity and tension of differences, that are important from the point of view of both ethics and comparative studies.

Berdyaev is categorized as a Christian existentialist. He was born in Kiev in a time of “shattering economic change,” born to a noble family in the decade following the emancipation of serfs (Lowrie 15). He lived through two great social upheavals: First was the Russian revolution of 1917, in which the Tsarist regime was overthrown, eventually to be replaced by a Bolshevik government. And second was World War II. Amidst all these changes, Berdyaev grew acutely aware not merely of the problems of individuals, but of society and history as a whole. This awareness led him to deeply consider the mission of his nation amidst these changes, writing several books on the subject—*The Spirit of Russia* (1915), *The Fate of Russia* (1918), and *The Russian Idea* (1946) immediately come to mind. He often wrote on themes concerning religion, ethics, and art. And his writing was deeply influenced by literature, especially that of Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Watsuji was 15 years Berdyaev’s junior. He was born in Hyōgo Prefecture, also in a time of great social upheaval, which characterized the Meiji period. Japan was in a frenzy of modernization, frantically trying to absorb and appropriate the influx of ideas from the west, and suffering from a loss of national identity in the process. In addition to this, the events leading up to the Pacific War, the events during the war, and those after the war as well proved to have a very significant effect on the thought of Watsuji as well. Like Berdyaev, these sweeping nationwide changes triggered a deep concern within Watsuji for the fate and mission of Japan, a concern that led to the authorship of numerous articles and full-length books on Japanese culture, the spirit of Japan, the role of Japan in the war, and the importance of Japan in the fate of the world. Ethics, culture, religion, and art also form the large bulk of Watsuji’s work. And his ethical views were deeply informed by a writer as well—Natsume Sōseki (Dilworth 7-8).

Comparing these short descriptions of Berdyaev and Watsuji, one is struck by the remarkable similarity of the life circumstances that formed them and the themes they wrote about. Perhaps one might even be under the impression that these two thinkers

are largely identical thinkers on separate sides of the fence: West/East, Russian/Japanese, Christian/Buddhist. But such an impression would be largely mistaken, because these two thinkers couldn't be more different from each other in the way they responded to their life circumstances.

After Watsuji's initial flirtation with western individualism and philosophy, he largely concerned himself with nationalist themes. And all throughout the war, Watsuji strongly supported nationalist tendencies toward Japanese particularism and the imperial system, to the point that he is often referred to as a totalitarian thinker (see Bellah; Bernier). On the other hand, Berdyaev was a consummate rebel, who is sometimes referred to as an anarchist (Hoffman). In Lisin's biography of Berdyaev, we see that in 1898 Berdyaev was arrested for participating in Marxist student demonstrations and eventually expelled and exiled. In 1917, Berdyaev was found guilty of blasphemy and exiled to Siberia for criticizing the Holy Synod of the Russian Church. In 1921, he was arrested for treason due to his anti-Bolshevik teachings, and was eventually banished from Russia.

The tension between the similarity and difference of these two thinkers is clearly manifest in their writings on ethics, and it is this that we shall explore in this paper. We shall begin with a brief outline of Berdyaev's idea of ethics, beginning with the fundamental notion of personality, then proceeding to three kinds of ethics: ethics of law, which is negated by ethics of redemption, and finally culminates in a strongly individualistic ethics of creativeness. We shall then proceed in a similar fashion with Watsuji's main ideas: ethics, *ningen*, and double-negation, and show how Watsuji's ethics fundamentally tends toward prioritizing society. Having laid the foundations, we shall compare these two thinkers and see how their differences can help balance the tendencies present in each ethical system.

### BERDYAEV: THE CREATIVE ETHICS OF PERSONALITY

*Personality.* No discussion of Berdyaev's ethics can be accurate without beginning with a discussion of his fundamental notion of personality. While themes of creativity and freedom form the most apparent part of his work, these themes are only of importance in so far as they allow for the self-fidelity, self-construction, and self-expression of personality. But what does the word "personality" mean for Berdyaev?

The idea of personality is developed heavily in two particular books: *The Destiny of Man* (1931) and *Slavery and Freedom* (1939). In the former book, Berdyaev raises the idea of the human being as personality in contradistinction to various views of the human being:

as *homo sapiens*, as a rational animal, and as a productive member of society (48-49). His main concern is that these views merely take one part of the human person—his biology, rationality, or social function—while neglecting other integral parts, and in so doing subsume the human person to become merely an individual member of a greater whole—one *homo sapiens* amongst others, one rational being amongst others, one functionary amongst many functionaries. In response to this, he asserts that the human being is a personality and a personality is never merely a part of a whole, not even the whole of the universe or of history (*Slavery and Freedom* 20-26). The reason why personality can never be merely subsumed to a greater whole is because by personality, Berdyaev refers to *every* facet of the human person—not merely one’s biology or rationality, but every facet of one’s physical, psycho-emotional, historical reality. And if we consider every part of the human person, we see that every personality is unique, incomparable, and irreducible to any other reality. Berdyaev writes, “The secret of the existence of personality lies in its absolute irreplaceability, its happening but once, its uniqueness, its incomparableness” (*Slavery and Freedom* 23).

That personality is the whole human being taken as a whole-in-itself is the first facet of the notion of personality, naturally leads to the second facet, which is personality as a manifestation of spirit. Personality as spirit fuses together a theological notion with a very secular one. Berdyaev writes: “personality is not generated, it is created by God. It is God’s idea, God’s conception, which springs up in eternity ... Personality is the image and likeness of God in man and this is why it rises above the natural life” (*The Destiny of Man* 55). But by image and likeness of God, he is referring to something with a very this-worldly importance: as a unique being, personality heralds the possibility of seeing things in a new way, of creating new things, relations and values, of world transformation. In other words, personality is a manifestation of the spirit, made in the image and likeness of God, and as such, personality is a unique space for the creation and transformation of reality.

However, while the human being *is* personality, a whole-in-itself and a manifestation of the spirit, personality is also a task—that is, it is something each person *ought to become*. Berdyaev writes:

Personality is self-constructive, not a single man can say of himself that he is completely a person. Personality is an axiological category, a category of value. Here we meet the fundamental paradox in the existence of personality. Personality must construct itself, enrich itself, fill itself with universal content,

achieve unity in wholeness in the whole extent of its life. But for this, it must already exist. (*Slavery and Freedom* 23)

While to be personality means to be a unique whole onto oneself, people often neglect their uniqueness and transformative capacity and subordinate themselves to the anonymous safety of various herds. While to be personality means that every single facet of one's person is part of the manifestation of spirit, many cling merely to facets of themselves instead of trying to reconcile the entirety of their personality. So we see here that personality is simultaneously a fact and an ethical challenge posed to human beings.

One core element of personality as a task is the task of self-transcendence: "Man is a being who surmounts and transcends himself. The realization of personality in man is this continuous transcending of self" (*Slavery and Freedom* 29). Creativity is our birthright, as personality. But manifesting this creativity is a two-fold task: On one hand, we have to have the courage to be true to ourselves, to accept ourselves and our uniqueness. But on the other hand, we cannot merely be self-engrossed, but we must open ourselves up to fully experience and encounter the events, people, realities that we are to transform. Personality in its self-fidelity is never a self-enclosed ego. Self-fidelity is a self-sacrifice that moves outside oneself and one's individual fate in order to transform the world.

We have seen four facets of personality: personality as the whole human person taken as a whole-in-itself, personality as a manifestation of spirit, personality as a task, and personality as a task of self-transcendence. With the first facet, we see that the initial trajectory of the notion of personality is individualistic—it aims to preserve the individual from the tyranny of collectives, in order to allow it to manifest the creativity that it fundamentally possesses. But we have also seen that there a movement toward what is outside the individual—a creative overflow to other persons and realities in society and history.

### THREE FORMS OF ETHICS

It is out of a desire to defend the self-fidelity of personality that Berdyaev constructs his view of ethics. He discusses three forms of ethics: ethics of law, ethics of redemption, and ethics of creativeness.

*Ethics of Law.* The first form of ethics that Berdyaev discusses is ethics of law. This form of ethics is the most basic, primitive, and widespread, present in every society in one form or the other. Its universality comes from its indispensability in the formation and

continuity of any society, for ethics of law has to do with the rules of behavior that allow people to work with each other, by inhibiting unruly personal instincts and socializing them, subjecting individuals to the shared rhythms of society. He includes beneath this subdivision of ethics most forms of ethics from the system of totems and taboos in primitive society, to the vengeance morality of tribes, to the most developed form in Kant's ethics where the individual submits to universal law.

While the socialization of individuals makes society possible and creates a structure within society that prevents violence against the individual, this very socialization is also the root of the basic deficiency of ethics of law. Ethics of law is inherently social. Berdyaev writes, "The ethics of law means, first and foremost, that the subject of moral valuation is society and not the individual, that society lays down moral prohibitions, taboos, laws and norms to which the individual must submit under penalty of moral excommunication and retribution" (*The Destiny of Man* 86). Because the moral subject is society and not the individual, this means that oftentimes, the moral struggles of the individual are overlooked. This is manifest in the phenomenon of moral objectification, in which we look at a person or circumstance and only see if it is good or evil, without seeing the subtleties and tensions within the particularities of the circumstance or the developing person. We merely see the impurity of the prostitute and the holiness of the pharisee, without seeing the redemptive possibilities within evil, or the danger of self-righteous pride within goodness.

However, what is most problematic for Berdyaev is that when we take the idea of good and evil and the valuations of society to be higher than personality, society is allowed to tyrannize the creative freedom of the individual. Berdyaev writes:

The fatal consequence of the legalistic discrimination between good and evil is tyranny of the law which means tyranny of society over the person and of the universally binding idea over the personal, the particular, unique and individual. The hard-set crystallized forms of herd life in which the creative fire is almost extinct oppress like a nightmare the creative life of personality. (*The Destiny of Man* 92)

Forced to merely conform to the orders of the herd, personality is unable to realize its unique and transformative capacities, and as such, the individual and society as a whole are left to stagnate beneath the banner of ethics of law.

*Ethics of Redemption.* The second form of ethics Berdyaev discusses rises as a rebellion against ethics of law, and is referred to as ethics of redemption. The main spirit of ethics of redemption is to break past the fixation of both society and the individual on the idea of good and evil, in order to allow people to see the particular human person standing behind an action, and the subtleties, tensions, and possibilities of the circumstances he finds himself in. In other words, ethics of redemption restores the priority of the concrete and particular human person from the tyranny of the socially prescribed idea of the good.

This notion of ethics is closely tied-up with Berdyaev's interpretation of Christianity. According to Berdyaev, primordial Christianity is precisely an ethics of redemption. Christianity is not about creating a new order of values or a new structure of society. Instead, it is about breaking past values and social impositions to return to the complexities of the human person in need of salvation.

Berdyaev shows this movement toward the human person in Christianity through the image of the burning of values, "'I am come to send fire on the earth.' In this fire are burnt up all the old, habitual moral valuations, and new ones are formed. The first shall be last, and the last first. This means a revolution more radical than any other" (Berdyaev *The Destiny of Man* 109). In the gospels we find many instances wherein Jesus openly valued the very things that society deemed evil or impure. He was born in circumstances of poverty, associated with the morally low in society, forgave sinners, fraternized with the sick, and died on a cross like a common criminal. Poverty, sin, illness, shame, and death—all the things that people flee as they chase after wealth, purity, health, and honor in life—these were the very things that Jesus willingly faced. For Berdyaev, it is precisely this revolutionary way of life that serves as the fire that razes the moral objectifications of society and forces them to face what they choose to flee from.

By breaking past moral objectifications and seeing the image of God in every human being, the pharisee and prostitute alike, we are able to engage the true human struggles that occur beneath the veneer that is subject to moral valuation. We are able to be attentive to the struggle of the sinner to transmute his impurity, through humility, into an opportunity for growth and compassion. We are able to pay notice to the struggle of the holy man to constantly keep watch over the self-righteous pride that shadows him. We are able to see how each and every human being bears his cross, in every situation he is faced with, and see how true goodness or evil cannot merely be what society imputes, but must be linked with the inner dynamic of the human being as he strides and falters beneath his cross.

*Ethics of Creativeness.* The third form of ethics that Berdyaev discusses is ethics of creativeness, or creative ethics. Berdyaev (*The Destiny of Man* 126) begins his chapter on the ethics of creativeness by alluding to the parable of the talents. No matter how earnestly one pursues the ethics of law, one is merely burying one's talents in the sand, trying hard to preserve pre-existing values without creating new ones. But through ethics of redemption, which cures the myopic fixation on pre-existing valuations and opens up the possibilities of moral life present within the actuality of one's moral reality, it becomes possible to take an entirely different attitude toward ethics: a *creative* attitude.

Creative ethics demands the *creation* of values—not mere repetition of tradition but a creation of novel ways to respond to one's present situation. Only on the ground of creative ethics is it possible to be faithful to what it means to be personality, and allow one's personality to express and construct itself. But this creativity is founded on two tensional notions: on one hand, creativity requires the ascending movement of freedom. On the other hand, creativity requires the descending movement of compassion.

The ascent in freedom is present in contemplative practices and other practices that negate the myopia of the herd and allow one to experience reality in its fullness and depth. It is also present in one's attempt to liberate oneself from one's attachments and one's desires, many of them shared with and fueled by society. But most importantly, the ascent of freedom manifests itself as moral *imagination*, seeing how reality could be better, how values could be better, how the surplus entailed in "better" might be drawn from the possibilities presented in the depth of one's personal experience (see Berdyaev *The Destiny of Man* 142).

However, on its own, the ascent of freedom is not sufficient for the realization of creativity. In order to realize creativity, one must descend in compassion and construct the better world one imagines amidst the broken world one faces, even if this means subjecting one's creative idea to the fetters of time and society. In descent of compassion, one must go beyond the very self that one sought to redeem in ethics of redemption, open it up, and direct one's personality outward toward other personalities. The self cannot merely be absorbed within its own struggles, it must see itself in solidarity with others who struggle as well.

Through the tensional unity of the ascent that negates society and its dictates and the descent that negates the individual in order to return to society, through freedom and compassion, the movement of creative ethics becomes possible. And through creative ethics, one is faithful to one's nature as personality—a uniquely transformative whole-in-itself, constantly on its way to being itself and at the same time transcending itself.



## WATSUJI: DOUBLE-NEGATION IN THE ETHICS OF NINGEN

In the following section, we shall briefly introduce Watsuji Tetsurō's ethics. A single phrase provides the gateway to Watsuji's system of ethics: *Ningen gaku toshite no rinrigaku*—Ethics (*rinrigaku*) as the study of man (*ningen*). The way to the crux of this phrase is presented in the very words themselves, particularly the word for "ethics" and the word for "man."

In Japanese, ethics is *rinrigaku*. Watsuji explains that the first character, *rin*, means *nakama*, a group or fellowship and the members or fellows contained therein (*Rinrigaku* 10-11). Coupled with the second character *ri*, which means reason, logic, or rhythm, and *gaku*, which means study, ethics as *rinrigaku* is therefore the study of the ways that govern not merely isolated individuals, but both the members of groups and the groups themselves. Watsuji writes, "*Rinri*, that is, ethics, is the order or the pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible. In other words, ethics consists of the laws of social existence" (*Rinrigaku* 11). It is this notion of ethics that is mindful of both the individual and society that Watsuji raises against what he considers to be a largely individualist tradition of ethics in the west.

The same movement toward recognizing both the individual and society, instead of merely the individual, is present in the word for man, *ningen*. Watsuji writes, "Such words as *anthropos*, *homo*, *man*, or *Mensch* cannot denote anything but an individual human being" (*Rinrigaku* 13). The word *ningen* is different, however. On one hand, in everyday use, the word often means "an individual human person." But on the other hand, looking at the original Chinese characters, one sees that *ningen* literally means between persons, referring to the public sphere and the entire world of human beings. Watsuji writes, "The Japanese language, therefore, possesses a very significant word; namely *ningen*. On the basis of the evolved meaning of this word, we Japanese have produced a distinctive conception of human being. According to it, *ningen* is the public and, at the same time, the individual human beings within it" (*Rinrigaku* 15).

From these two etymologies, we can see an intimate relationship between ethics and *ningen*. Ethics is the study of the way of relations between humans. But also, the very word for human means both the persons who belong to the togetherness of humanity, and the very togetherness that is the whole of humanity itself. Hence, we see that the approach to Watsuji's idea of ethics as the study of *ningen* necessitates that we maintain a dual focus on both the individuality of the person and the sociality of human relatedness manifested in the relationships a human being is situated in.

However, do the individual and social faces of our human existence smoothly reconcile with each other? A mere look at the intricate relationship between our own self-identity and the myriad and tensional identities we have and project to other people reveals that the dynamic between the individual and the whole, the relata and the relationships, is fundamentally complex. In the succeeding subsection, we shall explore the negative dialectic structure between the individual and the whole, and from there detail Watsuji's view of ethics.

### THE DUAL STRUCTURE OF NINGEN

What is the relationship between the individuality and sociality of a human being? What is the relationship between the individual and the whole? Watsuji attempts to answer these questions through a hermeneutics of everyday life.

The first everyday fact that he ascertains is that of *betweenness*. When a writer sits alone in her study, writing, she is expressing herself using words that are not of her construction, words she shares with many others in the present and in the past. Furthermore, the style and tone she adopts in writing will be largely shaped by the intended reader—whether it is a beloved friend, or an academic audience, or the readers of a magazine. The same thing occurs when a person steps into a classroom—how he will act, how he will speak, even where he will sit is determined by whether he is a student or a teacher, on what sort of relationship he has with the others in the room. This same matter is present in all our actions, whether at home, at work, or even in private. What does this signify? Watsuji writes, “It indicates precisely that we take our departure not from the intentional consciousness of ‘I’ but from ‘betweenness’. The essential feature of *betweenness* lies in this, that the intentionality of *I* is from the outset prescribed by its counterpart, which is also conversely prescribed by the former” (*Rinrigaku* 51).

If one looks at one's life without any lens of individualistic abstraction, one finds that the individual is automatically formed by other individuals, and this dynamic of reciprocal formation lends a sense of the whole. Reality occurs not between one separate individual and another, but in the *betweenness* that mutually constitutes each individual.

If one tries to grasp the individuality of the individuals, one finds that it is impossible to get a hold of an individual in isolation from others. Watsuji points out that in the relationship between mother and child, or between two lovers in a sexual act, or in two strangers lamenting the summer heat, we see that even if human beings are biologically separate, they cannot relate with their bodies merely as separate individuals—for our

bodies are determined by each other, affected by each other, and share similar experiences with each other.

The same holds true for emotions. Though emotions are deeply internal, sometimes not even visible to others, we find that our feelings are often shared with others—as the grief shared by parents who have lost a child. An important note Watsuji makes is that these shared feelings are not merely sympathy. He writes, “It is not that parents who have lost their beloved child are able to sympathize with each other. Instead, true sympathy lies in our ability to feel another person’s emotional experiences and share them” (*Rinrigaku* 70). It is the same case when a crowd enjoys a concert or a nation experiences collective shock after a nationwide calamity. Even our inner feelings arise in relation to the feelings of others.

This sociality is also manifest in the ground of ontology and our understanding of reality, a fact that is manifest most clearly in language. Watsuji writes:

What is required for us to search for the independent consciousness of the ‘I’ is the positing of the standpoint of the ‘I’ as existing alone, in which there is no one else with whom the ‘I’ shares the same consciousness. This is the case when, while alone, I look at the wall in my study and think of my self that is looking at it. However, in this case if I have become conscious of the wall as a wall, then social consciousness has already intervened. What is called a *wall* is that ‘form’ society imprints on clay or sand as a specific tool (that is, as part of a house). (*Rinrigaku* 73)

When we attempt to grasp the individuality of individuals, we end up instead with society, and the various ways in which society makes the individual what it is. Watsuji writes, “What is essentially communal makes its appearance under the guise of noncommunal, which is individuality. Hence, individuality itself does not have an independent existence. Its essence is negation, that is, emptiness” (*Rinrigaku* 80). Individuality is not something that exists apart from communalism. Only when we negate communalism and what is shared can we begin to be aware of what is different and unique in the individual. Furthermore, one can only have a sense of “independent action” or “seeing things for oneself” if one differentiates oneself from the whole by deliberately negating and critically suspending society and the various ways society shapes one’s automatic behavior (see Watsuji *Rinrigaku* 120-21). Hence, we see that individuality is

dependent on and inseparably linked with communal reality, and is hence of itself empty (*kū*).

However, does this mean that individuality is unreal and merely society is real? Is the individual person merely dissolved into the whole? But according to Watsuji, if we attempt to grasp the whole, we find that the whole is just as dependent on individuals as individuals are dependent on the whole.

Watsuji takes up the family as an example. While each individual's actions, demeanor, and very person is shaped by the whole of the family, one cannot say that the individual is reduced to being merely a part of the whole. For one, the family cannot exist without the members that constitute it. If there are no members, and nobody to continue bearing the family name, even the structures that are part of the family (an ancestral home) will crumble. Furthermore, unlike organs in an organism, members of a family have an independent existence. They can form other relationships and join other wholes outside of the family. Furthermore, this independence also determines the survival of the family. Watsuji writes, "If parents stop behaving as parents, children as children, wives as wives, and husbands as husbands, then the family will be dissolved" (*Rinrigaku* 89). Yet even if the family is dissolved, members can go on existing as individuals as part of other wholes. Hence for Watsuji, one certainly cannot see individuals as merely subsumed into the whole like organs in an organism.

Everywhere we are determined by collectives, from friendships between a few people, families, to large corporations, nations, even the entire global village. But these wholes can only exist in so far as they have constituents. And an individual is only a constituent of a whole in so far as it allows its independence to be negated by the whole. This negation is the essential feature of communalism, and Watsuji warns us not to neglect this facet (*Rinrigaku* 95-96). This negation is very clear in a relationship like the marriage between two people. If a marriage is to truly exist, both the husband and the wife have to give up many liberties—in the way they relate with people of the opposite sex, in the way they enjoy the company of their same sex friends, in the determination of their own schedules, in how they make decisions, in how they relate with their families and the families of their spouses. One cannot be single yet married at once, to marry one needs to surrender the liberties of single life and allow oneself to be constrained by the demands of married life. This negation is perhaps the meaning of the word "commitment," a self-negation without which the positive self-construction afforded by the whole of the husband-wife relation is not possible.

Hence we see that just as individuality is empty in that it exists merely as a negation of communality, communality is empty for it exists merely as a negation of the independence of individuals. The whole is dependent on and derived from its constituents, just as constituents are dependent on and derived from the whole. The relationship of individuality and sociality is one of mutual dependence and mutual negation, with neither having priority over the other. Neither can exist without the other, and it is this fact that determines the contours of Watsuji's ethics.

### THE FOUNDATION OF ETHICS AS DOUBLE-NEGATION

The mutual negation of the individual and society is something that we experience constantly all throughout our lives. However despite this constancy, each authentic community we participate in exists as a tenuous one. Watsuji writes, "When a specific association is constructed, it does not subsist statically as a fixed product. The essential feature characteristic of human association is its constantly putting into effect the movement of the negation of negation. When this movement comes to a standstill in one way or another, the association itself collapses" (*Rinrigaku* 117).

According to Watsuji, there are two ways that an authentic community can be destroyed. The first is if the constituents are merely subsumed into the totality, then it cannot be an authentic community. For Watsuji, an authentic community is fundamentally a community of individuals, negating themselves to be part of a whole. But if they merely subsume themselves into the totality, then they cease to be truly individuals, and hence are not really constituents of the community. Watsuji writes, "If an individual submerges herself in the whole and refuses to become an individual again, then the whole perishes at the same time" (*Rinrigaku* 118). For this reason, it is necessary for individuals to truly be individuals by negating society and critically arriving at a sense of individual understanding, will, and action.

However, this is also the second way that authentic community can be destroyed. If the individuals merely negate society to take their own standpoint but do not return to society by once more negating themselves, then the community loses its constituents as well and is destroyed. Watsuji writes, "If an individual, as the negation of emptiness, sticks to this negation in such a way as to refuse to allow the negation of negation to occur as well, then that association disintegrates on the spot" (*Rinrigaku* 117-18). Hence, we see that while the negation of the whole is necessary in order to be an individual, a second negation

is necessary in order to return to society and express one's individuality as a committed member of the group.

What we see here is that while we are always existing both as individuals and as members of collectives, authentic community is a constant ethical struggle of negation, to prevent us from stagnating within mere closed groups and at the same time to prevent us from falling into meaningless isolation. The self-authenticity of *ningen* as both individual and social is an ethical task of constant negation. Watsuji summarizes his ethical standpoint as follows:

The negative structure of a human being is, as was said previously, the fundamental law that renders a human being capable of continuously forming itself. Were we to deviate from this law, we would cease to exist. Therefore, this law is the basis of human being. At the outset, we prescribed the ground of human community, namely, the law of a human being, as ethics. Therefore, we can assert that this fundamental law is basic ethics. Basic ethics is the basic principle of ethics. We can describe the basic principle of ethics in terms of "the movement in which absolute negativity returns back to itself through negation." (*Rinrigaku* 119)

The negation of the whole and the negation of individual are both relative negations that realize the emptiness of both the individual and the whole. But the very *movement* of negation, the constant proceeding beyond in reciprocal determination is *absolute negativity*, and it is this that is the foundation of ethics.

Watsuji's idea of ethics as the movement of absolute negation is made more concrete with his example of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (*Rinrigaku* 122-23). The Buddha was raised in a Hindu culture as the crown prince of the kingdom of the Shakyas. As a Hindu, his worldview was framed by the caste system, a system of distinctions he was even more aware of because he was to be king. He was also greatly shaped by his relationships which placed various obligations upon him: He had obligations to his father as his successor, obligations to his wife as her husband, to his son Rahula as his father, to his people as their future king, and so on. But he abandoned all these, the common world view, his relations and the obligations these entailed, his name, his title, everything that he owned. This manifests the first movement of absolute negation in which he critically suspended and distanced himself from the many wholes that he was a part of in order to

recover a purely individual and independent standpoint from which he could see the truth of and by himself.

The importance of this first negation is recognized by Watsuji in his critique of closed society:

It is also an error to attach excessive importance to a closed society and pretend that it is the ultimate aim. Because the latter view disregards the significance that the socio-ethical organization gains through returning to the Absolute alone, it undermines ethics even though it places emphasis on obedience to the whole.... Where an individual who revolted against a family or a state, finds himself based in the Absolute, then by what right can a family or a state, as finite wholes, demand the negation of this individual? Even the prosperity of a state, insofar as this state is but a finite group of human beings, is not given priority over the dignity of an individual who originates in the Absolute. (*Rinrigaku* 123)

While the world-view, society, and relationships the Buddha negated are important, it is only by negating them that the Buddha could stand before the Absolute himself, and manifest the movement of absolute negativity. But this first movement is of course insufficient—if Buddha had stopped there, then his act would merely be one of irresponsible rebellion. There is a need for a second negation.

After attaining enlightenment under the bodhi tree, despite all his apprehensions about his capacity to help other human beings, the Buddha returned to society. Watsuji writes, “When the Absolute was revealed to [Buddha and Jesus], were they satisfied simply with submerging themselves in [the Absolute]? Not at all. Instead, they returned into the midst of the socio-ethical organization, expounded a ‘new social ethics’ or established a society of priests as an ideal yet typical socio-ethical organization” (*Rinrigaku* 122).

Through the first negation, Prince Siddhartha was able to realize things that his society had not realized before. By negating social prejudices, he was able to see beyond the caste system into a new order of morality. By negating his relationships and status, he was able to come to a realization of a completely different vista of relating within society as a *sangha* (Buddhist moral community). The first negation allowed him to rise up from the herd and become the Buddha, a *beacon*. But to become a beacon *for humankind*, another negation was required. The Buddha had to leave the solitude of the forest and return to the hustle and bustle of society, to his kingdom, to his father, his wife, and son. And only

in returning could he make his vision of humankind relevant, abolish the caste system and champion a new moral order, and establish his vision of the *sangha*. Through this double-negation, the Buddha manifested the ethics of absolute negativity.

On a final note, Watsuji asserts that this second negation cannot be the final one: “The self-return of the Absolute is realized endlessly, and has nothing to do with a static and absolute destination. The place in which this self-returning is exhibited is the socio-ethical whole as finite. This is why the *movement* of the negation of absolute negativity is said to be the law of human beings; that is, it is ethics” (*Rinrigaku* 121, emphasis mine). So long as we find ourselves as part of a whole or a community, there is a constant need to negate the whole and recover our independence let we fall into the stagnant subsistence of the herd. At the same time, so long as we find ourselves as independent individuals, we must negate ourselves to bring this independence to bear positively upon society. This constant movement of negation is the movement of absolute negativity, the law of being human—ethics.

#### TOTALITARIAN CRITIQUES OF WATSUJI

While Watsuji’s basic ethical framework presented in *Rinrigaku* appears to be fundamentally balanced, mindful of both individuality and communalism, scholars argue that taken in light of the rest of his writings and the particulars of his ethics, Watsuji’s thought takes a totalitarian slant.

One scholar who argues such is Bernard Bernier, who in “National Communion: Watsuji Tetsurō’s Conception of Ethics, Power, and the Japanese Imperial State” writes that while Watsuji insists on an even balance between the individual and the collective, in reality he gives “clear ethical, and therefore ontological, priority to the collective as community” (86). He also asserts that while Watsuji gives value to the negation of society that forms our independent individuality, only the second negation (of the individual toward society) is truly valued as ethical. Hence, Bernier writes, “As Bellah, Piovesana, Odin, Berque, and Wu have noted, Watsuji’s insistence on sacrifice for and surrender to the community leads to a subsumption of the person to the collective, that is, to an ethics of positive acceptance, through individual choice, of the political order. As such, it has a sort of built-in totalitarian bias that LaFleur and Sakai have noted” (87).

In “Japan’s Cultural Identity,” scholar Robert Bellah argues along similar lines, writing “For Watsuji the state is the highest ethical structure.... The state is the expression of the absolute whole which is the same as absolute negativity or absolute emptiness....



Reverence for the emperor, which is the heart of Watsuji's ethics, is precisely the particular Japanese expression of this universal truth" (581). The totalitarian tendencies of a religious and ethical commitment to the state as absolute totality through reverence to the emperor become particularly dangerous when coupled with Watsuji's tendencies toward Japanese particularism, a movement wherein thinkers sought to retrieve what was unique and superior in Japan in comparison to other cultures in the world. Bellah points to various ways in which Watsuji argued for the superiority of Japanese culture, and how these became part of a dangerous wartime rhetoric (581-85). (See Watsuji's "The Way of the Japanese Subject.")

Any ethical thinker who seriously takes up Watsuji's ethics must consider these dangers, and how they might be addressed in any attempt to re-appropriate Watsuji's ethical structures. Perhaps a way beyond both Watsuji's totalitarian bias and Berdyaev's individualistic bias might be found in a critical comparison of the fundamental ethical structures each philosopher suggests.

#### BERDYAEV AND WATSUJI: SOCIAL CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE SOCIALITY

The points of emphasis of Berdyaev and Watsuji are clear from their very starting point. Berdyaev's notion of personality begins as a clearly individualistic idea, whose main importance is to preserve the independence, uniqueness, and creativity of personality from the tyranny of society in political, spiritual, epistemological, and ontological spheres. However, this personality acquires a sense of openness and communalism with the notion of the personality as a *space* for transformation and the task of self-transcendence. Other persons and the community of persons are seen as objects of compassionate behavior and recipients of one's creative ethics. Despite this, the notion of the other as co-creative agent is not emphasized.

On the other hand, Watsuji's notion of man as *ningen* has a very strongly relational bent. While both the individual and communal facets of human existence are asserted, most of the examples he raises consider the *betweenness* of human intentionality and not the private aspect. While the individual is seen as indispensable for the survival and manifestation of the whole, and also as the agent for standing before the absolute, the notion of uniqueness and creativity of the individual is not stressed. In a sense, Berdyaev's personality and Watsuji's *ningen* present two angles of the same reality, both recognizing the individual and communal aspects of the person, with Berdyaev stressing the former and Watsuji the latter.

Despite this fundamental difference in emphasis, both Berdyaev and Watsuji provide a similar flow to the structure of ethics. What for Berdyaev is ethics of law reflects the order of unnegated closed society. Watsuji's notion of the negation of society that retrieves the independence of the individual is parallel to Berdyaev's notion of ethics of redemption. And the negation of the individual to return to society is also parallel with Berdyaev's notion of ethics of creativeness. Both Berdyaev and Watsuji see the value of each stage, but will place the highest value in the third stage of creative ethics or the return to society in double-negation.

Let us proceed to examine the similarities and differences of each stage in detail, and perhaps we might find what specific points of dialogue and mutual contribution there might be in the basic ethical framework of these thinkers.

### THE FIRST STAGE AND ITS NEGATION

It is interesting to note that despite Berdyaev's individualism, like Watsuji he clearly recognizes that ethics and order always begin with society, and not the isolated individual. This is perhaps a testament to society's formative capacity as a fundamental fact, no matter what angle reality is approached from. However, the difference between the two thinkers lies in how they see the limitations of this first stage of unnegated society, with regard to the person and with regard to history.

First, Berdyaev very clearly sees ethics of law and the order of unnegated society as a tyranny over and against the person and the capacity of personality to be the creative space that it is, in acknowledgment of its own uniqueness. And for this reason, the negation of society is one of *primary* importance to Berdyaev, because it is this first negation that hopes to retrieve the standpoint and self-fidelity of the individual. On the other hand, while Watsuji does see the limitation of closed society and the importance of the standpoint of the individual, this is expressed merely in that the individual is necessary for the survival and manifestation of the whole, or vaguely as the importance of allowing the individual to become self-aware, "stand before the Absolute," and be an authentic individual. While the notion of the herd (the Heideggerian *Das Man*) is somewhat criticized, the notion of closed society as a tyranny and violence against the individual remains largely unarticulated in Watsuji's work.

The concern over the self-fidelity of the free individual and the enslaving tendencies of closed society is clearly more apparent in Berdyaev. Berdyaev's book *Slavery and Freedom* is largely dedicated to detailing the different ways in which human beings are enslaved,

politically, spiritually, epistemologically, and ontologically by the pressures of society. Perhaps a more detailed study of the dangers of closed society would supplement Watsuji's view of the importance of the individual person and the specific dangers of closed society.

Second, Berdyaev criticizes ethics of law as very strongly limiting the creativity of the individual, a creativity that is necessary not only for the self-fidelity of the individual but for the growth of society as well. According to Berdyaev, the challenges presented by sin and evil are constantly changing with the situations. If we merely give the pre-established herd reactions to these situations, we can hardly expect our values to be responsive. Contemporary phenomena like modern science and technology, global consumerism, globalization, information availability, and so on give rise to a moral context that is very different from that of Buddha or Jesus or Kant. A true response to our present moral context requires critical, reflective, and creative thinking—something that requires the individual. But in Watsuji (See *Rinrigaku* 181-221), the importance of creativity and the need for society to constantly adapt to changing circumstances is often overshadowed by an emphasis on tradition and continuity. Perhaps an attempt to bring Watsuji's framework to consider the demands of historical change and creativity presented by Berdyaev would be very fruitful.

## THE SECOND STAGE AND ITS NEGATION

Both Berdyaev and Watsuji, one Christian and the other Buddhist, see the primordial movement of religion as one that negates society and ethics of law to return to the standpoint of the self-aware, independent, and authentic individual. We have seen in the preceding subsection the significance of this negation. And as expected from Berdyaev who values the individual more, he is able to give a more detailed account on the positivities that arise from the individualistic standpoint of religion.

One of the most socially important phenomena that Berdyaev points out in the ethics of redemption is the growth in one's capacity for compassion toward the suffering of the concrete other and the person to person relationship that arises from this (*The Destiny of Man* 119-22). For Berdyaev, when one breaks past the moral objectifications of the herd, one is able to face one's own personality as a whole, even the parts which are deemed reprehensible, and attempt to redeem oneself in one's entirety. Part of facing oneself as a whole is facing the darkness of one's suffering, a task Berdyaev symbolizes as carrying one's cross. But it is this same cross that puts us in touch with the cross of our fellow human being, and the importance of compassionately helping our neighbor bear his cross.

What we have here is a movement from person to person that stretches the boundaries of an individualist standpoint without completely breaking through into a social one. For Berdyaev, I help my neighbor bear his cross, but we do not bear it *together*. Perhaps this is a part of Berdyaev's work that deserves attention from Watsuji's framework, but at the same time can be further informed by Watsuji's viewpoint as well.

The greatest difference between Berdyaev and Watsuji at this point has to do with the critique of the individualist standpoint. Looking at Watsuji's framework, we see many dangers to an individualist standpoint. In a sense, Watsuji's entire ethical framework exists as a critique of individualist ethics. Human beings are contingent on society for their survival. But more than that, meaningfulness, emotional life, and one's practical pursuits are only possible in active relation not merely from one person to another but *between* persons, that is, persons finding meaning in their relationship with each other, giving meaning to experiences together, struggling with existential concerns together, and making visions real together. However, the notion of a criticizing individualism is barely visible in Berdyaev's work. While Berdyaev admits that the Christian ethics of redemption in its primordial form can have nothing to do with the state, economics, and social structures, he never speaks of this as a limitation to ethics of redemption (*The Destiny of Man* 125). This is part of why the transition from ethics of redemption to ethics of creativeness is unclear: while it is emphasized that ethics of redemption is an overcoming of ethics of law, ethics of creativeness appears more as a building on ethics of redemption than an overcoming of it. This is something that is more clearly manifest when we examine the third stage of ethics.

### THE THIRD STAGE

For both Berdyaev and Watsuji, the third stage presents a double negation where both the social standpoint of ethics of law and the individual standpoint of ethics of redemption are overcome. Berdyaev's notion of the unity of freedom and compassion in creativity contains the tensional unity of ascent (toward independence) and descent (toward relationality), which mirrors the basic structure of Watsuji's absolute negativity and the double negation of the individual and the whole.

However, as the culminating point of their three-stage ethics, the notions of creative ethics and double-negation show considerable structural differences. In Berdyaev, the three stages of ethics follow a somewhat linear progression, where one moves (in different herds in one's life) from ethics of law to ethics of redemption and finally to ethics of creativeness. Ethics of creativeness appears to exist as an endpoint that manifests itself continuously in

what Berdyaev terms as an ethics of energy. On the other hand, the three stages of ethics in Watsuji are dialectical and continuous. The first stage (society) and the second stage (the individual) exist in constant tension and negate each other in a back and forth fashion. This movement of mutual negation manifests the third stage, wherein double-negation is manifest in the *topos (basho)* of absolute negativity. What we see here is that the third stage is not one that comes sequentially after the first and the second, but somewhat dialectically as the non-reductive and tensional synthesis of the thesis and anti-thesis of the whole and the individual. Furthermore, the third stage is not arrived at merely by negating the first two stages once. The negation of mere individuality and closed sociality is something that needs to be constantly carried out. This need for *continuous* negation of ethics of law and ethics of redemption are not as distinct in Berdyaev's structure, but perhaps is closer to the existential reality of the task of the self-fidelity of personality.

Beyond the structural difference of Berdyaev's somewhat linear model and Watsuji's dynamic sublative triangular model, there are considerable substantive differences that have been alluded to in the discussion of the second stage of ethics. The key difference and perhaps the most fertile point for critical comparison can be raised as the following question: What is the relationship of creativity and community?

Creativity is perhaps Berdyaev's strongest contribution to ethics. He challenges us to go beyond merely repeating the pre-established moral orders and values of society, and instead become aware of, create, and *contribute* our own values into society as a dynamic response to the equally dynamic challenges of our changing time. The notion of contributing values points to a subtle transcendence beyond ethics of redemption. Berdyaev writes, "Creative genius is bestowed on man for nothing and is not connected with his moral or religious efforts to attain perfection and become a new creature. It stands as it were outside the ethics of law and the ethics of redemption and presupposes a different kind of morality" (*The Destiny of Man* 130). Creative ethics is not concerned with the self. It is a fundamentally self-forgetting, self-sacrificing movement, that unlike ethics of redemption is not even concerned with its own salvation. Its primary concern is the personality of others and the construction of the kingdom of God on Earth. This is compassion—a refusal to content oneself with the contemplation of the one, the true, the good, and the beautiful; an exigency to bring down these transcendental ideas and make them manifest in the concrete realities of society.

However considering this matter from Watsuji's framework, one is led to ask: while creative ethics is one of self-sacrifice, does it truly and consummately transcend the

standpoint of individualism? For certain there is a kernel of transcendence in Berdyaev's *The Destiny of Man*, where he writes:

The true purpose and meaning of love is not to help our neighbours, do good works, cultivate virtues which elevate the soul, or attain perfection, but to reach the union of souls, fellowship and brotherhood. Love is a two-term relation and presupposes the meeting of two, their communion and unity, and the formation of a third—fellowship and brotherhood. (187)

Furthermore, he also writes, "Society has an ontological kernel, which the state has not; the Kingdom of God is a society, an ontologically real communion between persons" (198). Clearly the potential of transcending both the herd society's standpoint and that of the independent individual is present, wherein one can arrive at a standpoint that is neither social nor individual but a standpoint of the spiritual community of self-aware but self-negating selves.

However, Berdyaev does not seem to develop this point within his framework of creative ethics. This is suggested first by the fact that Berdyaev repeatedly disparages the second movement of creativity where the creative vision of the individual is manifested in the world. He writes, "The inner creative act in its fiery impetus ought to leave the heaviness of the world behind and 'overcome the world'. But in its external realization the creative act is subject to the power of 'the world' and is fettered by it" (*The Destiny of Man* 129). Berdyaev constantly laments the concretization of the creative act as a necessary tragedy that douses the original flame of creativity. For certain this can be the case, but within our human experience, is it not often the case that one's creativity is *enriched* precisely by the act of trying to realize one's creative idea within the constraints of form and in tarrying with convention?

The second manifestation of Berdyaev's incapacity to overcome the individualist standpoint is that for him creativity constantly remains as individual creativity. While Berdyaev speaks of creating *for* others and *in* society, he does not speak of creating *with* others. Nor does he delve into one's duty toward the creativity of others, nor does he explore how more than one personality can act together in a shared task of creativity. Yet in our everyday lives, doesn't the creativity of others and the creativity shared with others matter just as much as our own creativity?

The third manifestation is the subject-object duality present in Berdyaev's notion of creative imagination, where he writes, "Creativeness means in the first instance imagining

something different, better and higher. Imagination calls up before us something better than the reality around us. Creativeness always rises above reality" (*The Destiny of Man* 142). Berdyaev's view of creativity presupposes a duality between creator and created, between the creative subject and the transformed object, where merely the subject is active and the object remains a passive recipient of creativity. However, is it that we, separate from reality, imagine a better reality, or is it that from reality, an image of a better way of reality's self-realization comes alive through us?

Berdyaev's view of creativity appears to be limited in that it does not take into account the creativity of others and the creativity shared with others. Nor does it appear to delve deeply into the reciprocal activity between the creative subject and object. Perhaps it is because of these limitations that Berdyaev does not appear to fully appreciate the descent of the creative idea in its concretization. But more significantly, these limitations are of grave importance when we consider creativeness in the realm of relationships and communities. For instance, if I have a creative idea of how I want my family to be or how I want my country to be and I imagine this idea as my own vision that rises above the reality involved, separate from the movements of the community itself, separate from the creative ideas of my family members or my country men, then is my creativity not reduced to tyranny instead?

It is ironic, but unless Berdyaev's notion of creativity can overcome its individualism and dualism, it cannot be applied to human relationships and human communities without becoming the very tyranny that Berdyaev decries. In the succeeding final section, I wish to take Berdyaev's primary contribution to ethics, creativity, and address its fundamental limitations through the framework provided by Watsuji.

## THE COMMUNALITY OF CREATIVITY AND THE CREATIVITY OF COMMUNITY

Watsuji writes, "An individual becomes an individual by negating emptiness as her own fundamental source. This is the self-negation of absolute negativity" (*Rinrigaku* 117). The key phrase here is *self-negation*. While the movement of ethics of redemption is a movement of negating society, this is merely how it appears when viewed from the standpoint of the individual.

As we have seen in the sections on Watsuji, Watsuji endeavored to enumerate and give structure to the process by which the self is formed by a community. Our conceptualization of ourselves, our sense of identity, even our uniqueness is something that arises not separately from society, but precisely from and because of our relationships

within the various communities that we belong to. Our uniqueness comes from the unrepeatable ways in which the forces of society and various relationships come to form the nexus of the individual, and not an asocial arelational monad. Furthermore, it is not merely other *people* in our societies and histories that form us. Watsuji's notions of *fūdo* and the spatiality of *ningen* show how various insentient factors—climate, architecture, systems of communication, roadways, technologies, and so on—play a large but undervalued part of our becoming the people that we are.

Because of this, the individual, even in so far as he is unique, bears within himself the forces, pressures, tensions, and inconsistencies of the whole world. Because of this, while the first negation is a negation of the whole (of *ningen* and of the world), this cannot merely be seen as the individual negating the whole. Instead, it must simultaneously be seen also as the whole, manifesting itself in the individual, which is in turn negating the whole. Taking the example of an individual family member rebelling against her family of origin, is it because her family's values and viewpoints are completely alien to her that she rebels? Or is it precisely because she was formed by her family and its values that the very contradictions within this family and its structures can become manifest in her, leading to her rebellion? Even in Berdyaev, this self-negation of the whole is very clear: Berdyaev was after all a very devout Christian, but because of this, the contradictions of Christianity were very palpable to him, which led to his criticism of the Russian Synod and his eventual excommunication. Perhaps through Berdyaev, Christianity became aware of itself in a unique way, that led to its rebellion against itself.

Perhaps it can be said that all instances of rebellion are simultaneously a rebellion of the individual against the whole, and a rebellion of the whole manifest as the individual, rebelling against itself. However, when one comes to an existential realization of this self-negation of the absolute, a remarkable transformation occurs. On one hand, one becomes aware of oneself as a unique and unrepeatable manifestation of the whole of *ningen*, in whom the way of *ningen* is manifest in a wholly original way. One's individualization and differentiation is not merely a futile revolt against the whole, but a necessary revolt that is fueled by the whole itself. Perhaps this is how we can understand *freedom* in light of both Watsuji and Berdyaev.

On the other hand, one becomes aware that one's vision of reality is not merely one's own vision over and against the whole. Instead, it is a vision that belongs to the whole of *ningen* itself that has manifested itself through one's own vision. One's creative vision is part of the *self-transformation of the whole*. As such, one cannot merely foist one's creative vision upon the whole in a violent and tyrannical dualism between self and world.



Instead, one's creative vision becomes a manifestation of a dynamic acceptance of the world and a participation in its movement. Furthermore, seeing one's creative vision as a vision amongst other visions of and by the whole, one becomes part of a creative *discourse*, where one considers one's own vision, that of others in the past, present, and future, and the *shared* vision that can be formed from the society and history of creative personalities. Perhaps this is how we can understand *compassion* in light of both Berdyaev and Watsuji.

Putting together the notions of freedom and compassion, we have the self-fidelity of an independent individual standing forth as the unique self-realization of the whole of *ningen*, creatively giving of its own uniqueness through creative discourse as part of the dynamic acceptance of reality. This is the communality of creativity and the creativity of community, the self-unfolding of absolute negativity.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have taken up the question of self-fidelity, how we might be faithful to a self that is both individual and social at the same time. We have briefly explored the standpoints of both Nikolai Berdyaev and Watsuji Tetsurō. We have seen how despite their differences in emphasis, both thinkers see both the individual and social facets of human persons, and how these facets interact in a similar three-part ethics shared by both thinkers. In our detailed comparison of their basic ethical frameworks, we have seen how Berdyaev contributes strongly to an awareness of the dangers of unnegated society, the importance of the self-awareness of the individual, and the demand for creativity in ethics. On the other hand, we have seen how Watsuji contributes strongly to an awareness of the dangers of the individualistic standpoint, the importance of society, and the need to retrieve a sense of communality in the task of creativity. Finally, we explored the notion of communal creativity and creative community, wherein we attempted to fuse Berdyaev's creative individual with Watsuji's relational *ningen*.

It is hoped that this paper has shown the fruitfulness of a comparative study between two thinkers, so similar yet remarkably different. Many more questions remain for further study. One key idea would be Berdyaev's notion of *sobornost* and spiritual community: how might this idea be developed, especially in relation to Watsuji's notion of the authentic socio-ethical community? Another comparison that might be fruitful would be a comparison of Berdyaev's and Watsuji's views on the state and war. Finally, the comparison may also be pursued on religious grounds: how do Berdyaev's notion of God

as nothingness (*ungrund*) and Watsuji's notion of the absolute as absolute negativity affect their notions of religious ethics?

Hopefully through these questions, we might come to a deeper understanding of the common ground that binds Buddhist and Christian ethics, religious and social philosophy, and most importantly, our lives as they are lived.

## THE QUESTION OF CONTEXT

This essay has examined the relationship between two thinkers, one Russian, one Japanese. While they were contemporaries, they did not refer to each other. Nor has any serious research comparing them been done in the English language—a fact which hopefully, the reader now realizes is an unfortunate one. Perhaps through this essay, the reader has seen the fruitfulness of this comparison for east-west philosophy, Buddhist-Christian studies, and ethics as a whole. However, a question still remains: why is this research being initiated by a *Filipino* scholar?

Nikolai Berdyaev and Watsuji Tetsurō are almost invisible in the Philippine academic scene. While much work is being done on other Christian Existentialists from the continental tradition of philosophy, traces of a Filipino scholar who has devoted considerable research on Nikolai Berdyaev are hard to find. Perhaps several decades ago he was widely read as a popular author, his impact on the Philippines cannot be said to be mainstream. On the other hand, research on Japanese philosophy in the Philippines is entirely impoverished. To this date, the number of Filipino scholars working on Japanese philosophy can be counted on one hand. Work on Watsuji's ethics may be altogether absent, or stowed away unpublished.

Despite the invisibility of these two particular authors, there is evidence that both of them deserve attention within the Philippine context. Berdyaev's *The Destiny of Man* and Watsuji's *Rinrigaku* have been used by the author as required readings for the university level, and has found that both authors have much resonance with Filipino students. Berdyaev's work presents a different way of approaching Christianity in a country dominated by Christian thought. It would be interesting to explore how Berdyaev's notions of rebellion and creative ethics might be used to reinterpret distinctively Philippine phenomena such as the EDSA People Power Revolutions. Watsuji on the other hand seems to have more affinity due to his Confucian influences rather than his Buddhist influences. It would be interesting to see to what extent Confucianism is influential in the Philippines, not merely within the large Chinese-Filipino communities, but in the rest of the Philippines

as well. Understanding that would perhaps help verify whether it is a latent Confucianism within Filipinos that allows Watsuji's systematic ethics of betweenness to resonate.

However, more than the individual authors discussed, it is the opinion of the researcher that the most important question concerns the relationship of the Philippine context to the field of east-west comparative philosophy. In the classification of comparative philosophy, where does the Philippines stand in the (vague and complex) east-west divide? Looking at the curricula of the top three schools in the country at the very least, one sees that the curriculum has been and remains to be dominated by continental and Anglo-American philosophers, and of course a great number of Christian thinkers from every corner of the world. The eastern tradition of Philosophy—the lines of Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy—is largely marginalized. But does that mean that the Philippines is a Western country, at least philosophically speaking? While the researcher is in no position to say anything final on this matter, if one looks to the social, political, and religious mores, perhaps one might find that there is something fundamentally eastern (that is, of the Indian and Chinese traditions) within Philippine thought as well.

Perhaps one can conjecture that the Philippines is, philosophically, between the east-west divide of being vs nothing, individual vs society, rational vs pre-rational, and so on. While the lengthy history of colonialism has for certain entrenched the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Mill, and Rorty deep within the Philippine educational system, perhaps there are sensibilities that only Buddha, Lao Zi, Confucius, Dogen, and Watsuji can resonate with. And if that is so, if the Philippines is in a way neither east nor west, or both east and west, might that not imbue the Philippine academic scene with a special place within the global discourse on east-west philosophy?

With this essay we have discussed the points of similarity and difference between an eastern Buddhist thinker and a western Christian thinker. It is hoped that for those with an interest in Philippine studies, it will also awaken questions about eastern and western philosophy in the Philippines, and the role this country might play in this borderless dialogue as it simultaneously tries to build its own Filipino philosophy.

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