Confucian Reverberations in Watsuji Tetsurō's Ethical Philosophy: Exploring the Dynamic of the *Universal-in-Particular*

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Abstract:

This paper was born from an interest in how modern and contemporary Japanese philosophy engaged with Confucianism. Much was written about the political manipulations of the Confucian vocabulary between the late Meiji period and the end of WWII, yet such accounts tend to conclude in the summary dismissal of Confucianism's philosophical potential, especially within the postwar Japanese milieu. In this context, the ethical philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurō seems to provide an excellent start to explore and ultimately reframe this potential, as his writings not only span both the prewar and postwar periods, but they also reveal Watsuji's constant engagement with Confucianism throughout his later career. More specifically, I will explore the Confucian dimension of his ethical system by focusing on the dynamic of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal* (普遍性／特殊性) in three of his essays — *The History of Ethical Thought in Japan (Nihon rinri shisōshi)*, *Ethics (Rinrigaku)*, and *Confucius (Kōshi)*.

Keywords:

Watsuji Tetsurō, *fuhensei*, *tokushusei*, Confucianism, Nihon rinri shisōshi, Rinrigaku, Kōshi

Alongside Nishida Kitarō, Watsuji Tetsurō is regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, who more or less set the basis for the field of ethics in Japan.[1] His ethics of *in-betweenness* (aidagara) — the non-dualistic, mutually defining relationship between the individual and their community — still engages philosophers today and provides a sensible alternative to the individualistic tradition of Western ethics. However, long before Watsuji posited that the locus of ethics could not be found in 'indi-

vidual consciousness alone,' and that ethical questions of consciousness must include nature and society, Confucian philosophers had also asserted the same. Although not explicitly addressing the issue of individual consciousness, (Chinese and Japanese) Confucians oftentimes pointed to the mutually defining dynamic between humans and their milieu. [2]

As this paper will show, Watsuji's later-career quest for an ethical philosophy that counterbalances the individualistic tradition of Western ethics seems to have been underrun by two important elements: his attempt to define ethics within the framework of an organismic, non-dualistic dynamic between the *universal* (*fuhensei*) and *particular* (*tokushusei*) on the one hand, and his interest in Confucianism on the other. Yet, as I discussed elsewhere, these Confucian intensions of his ethics are far less explored in contemporary scholarship than his debt to Buddhist or Western philosophy. [3] Therefore, by focusing on the relationship between these two underrunning — yet seemingly separate — elements in his philosophy of ethics, my paper will attempt to explore this Confucian dimension of Watsuji's ethics. I will do so by discussing three essays: *Ethics* (*Rinrigaku*), *Confucius* (*Kōshi*), and *The History of Ethical Thought in Japan* (*Nihon rinri shisōshi*).

The three essays were not published in the order presented here. Watsuji published the first volume of *Rinrigaku* first and set about writing *Kōshi* before moving on to the second volume. *Nihon rinri shisōshi* was published last, in 1952, largely as a compilation of revised earlier essays, but also containing a freshly written *Preface* and a few additional chapters about the modern period. However, in order to clarify Watsuji's debt to Confucian ethics and the role it played in the development of his dynamic of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal*, the *Preface* to *Nihon rinri shisōshi*

(published last among the three essays) will be discussed first. Here, Watsuji explores this dynamic in detail, while also presenting his take on the role of Confucianism in the history of Japanese ethical thought. The second part of the paper will introduce *Rinrigaku* and explain both the Confucian dimension of his main ethical categories, as well as the essay's place within the framework of Watsuji's *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal* dynamic. The last essay to be analyzed is *Kōshi*, where his interest in Confucian ethics and its role in the above dynamic manifests itself in the form of a philological analysis of Confucius' *Analects*. In the concluding part of the paper, I will discuss the role Confucianism played in Watsuji's philosophy of ethics with reference to this dynamic relationship between *universal* and *particular*.

I. *Nihon rinri shisōshi*

Although different aspects of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal* dynamic appear throughout Watsuji's ethical writings, it is not until the *Preface* to the 1952 *Nihon rinri shisōshi* that he sets down a more detailed explanation of its principles. Here, he uses this dynamic to explore the history of ethical thought and its relationship to the philosophy of ethics, thus also offering an interpretation framework for his own philosophical system.

Universality (*fuhensei*), Watsuji posits, can only manifest itself in the form of *particularity* (*tokushusei*); any manifestation of a universal phenomenon can only take a particular form, a form which is necessarily bound by the *time* and *place* of its manifestation.[4] Consequently, any attempted definition of ethics must also take into account this principle and differentiate between two types of ethics: first of all, there is one, *universal ethics* (*rinri*), which applies to humanity in its entirety. However, when this universal ethics mani-

fests itself in any given milieu, it cannot escape its own historicity; therefore, it can only manifest itself as an *ethical thought* (*rinri shisō*) which necessarily takes the form of the socio-historical context it appears in. Consequently, the study of ethics also needs to have two separate categories: *a history of ethical thought* (*rinri shisōshi*) and an *ethics* (*rinrigaku*). In this sense, *gaku* represents philosophy, argumentation, the search for principles and patterns, whereas *shisōshi* represents *all* sources of ethical thinking (or teachings). The category of *rinrigaku* is something akin to rationality, in that it originates in the skepticism towards the (ethical) teachings of the sages; this skepticism is only the starting point of an endless effort to reach the core (origin) of the sages' teachings and to grasp the principles of *rinri*, the *universal ethics*. In any given historical period, *rinrigaku* can be defined as the understanding of *rinri*, which transcends the situatedness (*tokushuteki gentei*) of *rinrishisō*.

However, Watsuji stresses an important aspect of this dynamic: the relationship between the *universal* and the *particular* is never unidirectional (*universal-in-particular*), but always mutual (*universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal*). Just as *universality* only manifests itself in the form of *particularity*, the reverse also applies — localized (national) ethical thinking can only be considered *ethics* only insofar as it aims at *universality*.

It is within this framework, then, that we can read these three essays of Watsuji's together — as a career-long attempt to define ethics in terms of an organismic, non-dualistic dynamic between *universal* and *particular*. In this sense, his *Rinrigaku* could be read as an exploration of the '*universal*' element of ethics, *Nihon rinri shisōshi* as an attempt to grasp the '*particular,*' and *Kōshi* as a case-study of the organismic workings of this dynamic. It also seems relevant to note here that it is within this context that Watsuji

carves an important role for Edo-period Confucianism in the intellectual history of Japanese ethical thought, by hinting at its universalistic aspects: in Japan, where a discipline called *ethics* (*rinrigaku*) did not exist as such until the modern period, he credits Confucianism with being the closest thing to such an endeavor. In other words, he credits the Confucians of the Edo period with attempting to grasp the principles of universal ethics, *rinri*, thus unveiling a certain affinity for them, as well as situating them as his precursors, in a sense.

II. *Rinrigaku*

As mentioned earlier, *Nihon rinri shisōshi* and *Rinrigaku* represent, in a way, the two essential pillars of Watsuji's philosophical system, and are intricately woven together: while *Nihon rinri shisōshi* attempts to uncover the *particular* expression of universal ethical principles in Japan, *Rinrigaku* is the purely philosophical investigation of those *universal* ethical principles. Therefore, examining the latter within Watsuji's larger framework of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal* dynamic unveils important nuances about his philosophical 'debt' to Confucianism. However, as I have explored this Confucian dimension of the essay elsewhere,[5] I will only summarize the relevant points below.

In defining ethics (*rinri*) as 'the order or the pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible,' 'the laws of social existence,'[6] Watsuji directly references here the Confucian realm of human relationships. Yet, his use of this social framework is not limited to its historical *particularity* (i.e. the types of social relations representative of old Chinese society), but it is rather interpreted in its universalistic form, as 'the grand *rin* of human beings,' i.e. 'the most important kinds of human relation-

ships.'

Watsuji opposes this definition of ethics to 'the misconception, prevalent in the modern world, that conceives of ethics as a problem of individual consciousness only,' based on the individualistic conception of the human being and which attempts to 'consider the notion of the individual that constitutes only one moment of human existence and then substitutes it for the notion of the totality of *ningen.*'[7] But ethics cannot limit itself to the issue of individual consciousness, because the human being is by their very nature a social animal and cannot be separated from their social relationships. Consequently, ethics too needs to comprise the social dimension of the human being, together with the entirety of its textures. In this sense, Watsuji defines ethics as 'the way inherent in human relations,' which concerns itself with 'those problems that prevail between persons'.[8]

Yet, the relationship between the individual and society is not a dualistic one, but an organismic one, as expressed by the Japanese term *ningen* (in its literal meaning): 'It must be that a human being is capable of being an individual and, at the same time, also a member of society.' Therefore, Watsuji says, the 'study of ningen' and the 'study of society' are inseparable, and ethics should concern itself with the 'study of the human,' *without the primary distinction between the individual and society*.[9] In other words, Watsuji's individual and society (their milieu) are part of an organismic dynamic, *ningen sonzai*, which mirrors the dynamic of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal*: *ningen* is the 'public and, at the same time, the individual human beings living within it;' the word 'refers not merely to an individual *human being* nor merely to *society*;' oneself and the other are 'absolutely separated from each other but, nevertheless, become one in communal existence. Individuals are

basically different from society and yet dissolve themselves into society.'[10] His subsequent clarification of the linguistic 'ambiguity' concerning the whole and the parts of human existence also points to this type of dynamic: for example, *nakama* can also express a group or a single *nakama*; *roto* as a group and the individuals belonging to a group; the same goes for *tomodachi* (friends), *heitai* (soldiers) or *renshu* (a party). Thus, Watsuji concludes, 'in so far as human existence is concerned, *the whole exists in the parts and the parts in the whole*.'[11] [12]

The presence of these ideas in *Rinrigaku* suggest that the dynamic later detailed in the *Preface* to *Nihon rinri shisōshi* were already there, and he continued to explore its various mechanisms and nuances throughout his later academic career.

III. *Kōshi*

If in *Rinrigaku* and *Nihon rinri shisōshi* he explores the two non-binary poles of *universality* and *particularity* in ethics (*Rinrigaku* as the search for the '*universal*' element of the dynamic, and *Nihon rinri shisoshi* as the search for its '*particular*' one), in *Kōshi* Watsuji seems to take a markedly different approach to exploring the *mechanisms* of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-the-universal* dynamic, choosing a philological perspective. Again, he turns here to Confucianism, this time focusing on Confucius and his *Analects*.[13]

In the introductory part, Watsuji sets out to analyze the process by which Buddha, Jesus, Confucius, and Socrates came to be called 'humanity's Teachers' (*jinrui no kyōshi*), despite their historical situatedness[14] — in other words, the process by which they achieved ethical *universality* despite their *particularity*. In the dynamic of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-the-universal*, the relation-

ship between the two elements is bidirectional — just like *universal* ethics can only emerge in the form of the *particular*, *particular* ethics necessarily aims at *universality*, although it might not always achieve it. The case of the Four Teachers represents one such rare example, in which the teacher of a small ancient community has become the teacher of an extended cultural realm and ultimately of the entire humanity. In time, Watsuji notes, their cultural specificity crystallized to the extent of becoming unbound from their (cultural) particularity. But how did this process take place?

Watsuji starts his argument from the apparent contradiction that humanity — as the furthest thing from a unified society — has come to recognize these four figures as *universal*: what makes one person representative of an entire cultural sphere (Jesus for Europe, Socrates for Greece, Buddha for India, and Confucius for China), given that cultures — by their very nature — have almost limitlessly diverse sources to draw from? And what makes people ultimately choose and accept that *one* individual as representative? According to Watsuji, the answer to this question lies in the very nature of their philosophies — while embodying *universality*, they also (exquisitely) embody the *particularity* of their respective cultures. Watsuji is well aware here of the apparent contradiction, and makes a point to explain the organismic, non–dualistic nature of this dynamic: the expectation that a 'teacher of humanity' is purely *universal*, untouched by the *particularity* of their native culture, and that *particular* cultures do not carry any *universal* meaning is an abstract and unrealistic stance. In real history, there is no 'teacher of humanity' whose existence was not embedded in a *particular* cultural tradition; a human life that does not take as its object their own small human organization *cannot* exist; similarly, it is impossible to find a *particular* cultural tradition that does not hold within

it a *universal* meaning (*fuhentekina igi*). Just as humanity is not one monolithic society, the Four Teachers only represent one small piece of that whole (*zentai no uchi no hon no ichibubun*): Confucius lived in the lower reaches of the Yellow River; Gautama came from the mid-reaches of the Ganges; and Socrates' conversation partners only came from among the citizens of Athens. And yet, they are still called the 'teachers of humanity.' In their original teachings, the concept of 'world' (or 'humanity') referred only to their limited audience, and not to the entirety of humankind; their teachings only dealt with the moral life of their community (*jinrin no michi*) and were not intended for the world outside.

Later on, by looking at the lives of Buddha, Jesus, Confucius, and Socrates, Watsuji identifies a common pattern of this 'universalizing' process: the first stage is represented by a disappearing culture which crystallizes in the person and philosophy of one extraordinary individual, generally revolutionary in their thought;[15] the second stage is the process of idealization of that individual; and the third stage is their 'rebirth' as a teacher of subsequent generations. I will shortly present these stages below:

1) *The quality of the teacher's teachings*

What in these Saints' teachings gave them the potential of reaching universality? Watsuji notes that they are called 'humanity's Teachers' now not because of what they *taught* their specific community, but because of what they *can* teach people everywhere (*arayuru hito*). However, he clarifies, in their own time, the value of their teachings would not have been recognized — except maybe by their disciples; that is because the values they expounded were not easily recognizable as wisdom. Therefore, their *universality* came only after a long process, and mostly thanks to the work of

their disciples. One important aspect that Watsuji notes about the teachings of the Saints is their innovative nature. All these Teachers we call symbols of traditional culture today were revolutionary reformers in their own time — Gautama stood against the previously stratified four social classes, Jesus against the old Israeli cult and towards the understanding of the new *jinrin*, and Socrates took a stand against the Sofists.

Unlike Jesus and Buddha, Confucius never concerned himself with the issues of death, spirit (*tamashii*), or deities, nor did he want to penetrate the Absolute in a religious sense. His Heaven doesn't even have the religious nuance of Socrates' Daemon. As such, he would have appeared as a resolute critic and reformer of the religious tradition since the primitive age. Before him, religion, morality and politics had all been founded on the respect for the Heaven as a ruler of the skies, which bestowed fortune or misfortune, reward or punishment. But Confucius was undisturbed in following the Way (*jinrin no michi*), morality (*dōtoku*), and he was not moved by the dream of immortality or the salvation of his soul — he was only moved by the desire to understand and follow the Way. For Confucius, respect for Heaven will bring its good graces, but if one follows the right Way, then Heaven will also approve. In this sense, Watsuji sees Confucius as an innovator in the history of ideas, even if this aspect of his teachings was not emphasized in his earliest legend.[16] His disciples did not focus on the new things that Confucius had created, but rather on the ones he revived and established — and this, says Watsuji, was his disciples' biggest mistake.

2) *The stage of idealization*

Here, Watsuji explains the cultural process of becoming a 'hu-

manity's Teacher:' the cultural crystallization in the person of one Teacher depended on various elements such as the deep impressions of the disciples, their respect, the resonance of their teacher's wisdom in later periods, as well as the respect people held for the disciples' own teachings. Through the disciples' effort to deepen their master's teachings and the attention given to his extraordinary characteristics, a stage of *idealization* (*risōka*) would have been reached. This is not an idealization motivated by their desire to *embellish* his legacy, Watsuji notes, but stems from a genuine desire to deepen their understanding, which ultimately led to a strengthening of the teacher's influence on his later disciples.

3) *The 'rebirth' as a teacher of following generations*

As ages went by, this process of idealization intensified, and ever deeper meanings were extracted from the teacher's words. By this stage, the teacher would have become the personification of an ideal (*risōjin no sugata*); therefore, what passed as his biography in this stage would not have been the teacher's actual biography, but the understanding of a cultural development. As such, the biographies left behind for these Teachers cannot be taken at face value, as they are ambiguous and already filtered through the understanding of their disciples. Watsuji mentions here that, in Confucius' case, there existed more of a biographic footprint, but even his idealization process followed largely the same steps.[17]

Concluding his argument on Confucius, Watsuji remarks one important aspect of this *universalizing* process and the nature of historical development: when he emerged as a Teacher, Confucius appeared as a crystallization of pre–Qin culture; he lived and taught during the Han period, which was different in quality than pre–Qin; later on, he was evangelized during China's Golden Age (the

Tang and Song periods), which again was very different in quality from the Han period. As such, Confucius of the Han period and Confucius of the Song period cannot be one and the same. On the other hand, the Confucianism of the Han period *made* Han culture, and in the same way, Song Confucianism (Neo-Confucianism) — through its special understanding of Confucius' teachings — *made* Song culture. Yet, this is also the way in which the milieu-bound teachings of Confucius became *universal*.

Concluding remarks: the Confucian reverberations in Watsuji's philosophy of ethics

The analysis above reveals two important points about Watsuji's philosophy of ethics: on the one hand, taken together, the three essays represent the philosopher's career-long attempt at defining ethics in terms of an organismic, non-dualistic dynamic between *universal* and *particular,* comprising both its universal(istic) core, as well as its culturally-bounded manifestation(s). While the theoretical grounding of this dynamic doesn't seem clearly defined at the time he wrote *Rinrigaku* or *Kōshi*, its core elements seem already well established, and all that *Nihon rinri shisōshi* brings is an explicit and comprehensive analysis of its logic. The three essays can thus be taken to represent the philosopher's systematic approach to the intricate workings of this *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal* dynamic: while in *Rinrigaku* and *Nihon rinri shisōshi* he explores the two non-binary poles of *universality* and *particularity* in ethics (*Rinrigaku* as the search for the '*universal*' element of the dynamic, and *Nihon rinri shisoshi* as the search for its '*particular*' one), in *Kōshi* he takes a philological approach to exploring the *mechanisms* of this dynamic.

The second important conclusion that can be drawn from the

above analysis is the depth of Watsuji's engagement with Confucianism throughout this process. While not always explicitly so, Confucian ethics seems to have provided Watsuji with the bonding element for his entire philosophy of ethics. In *Rinrigaku*, this influence is somewhat clearer, as his repeated references to the Confucian dimension of his core ethical categories showed — ethics as concerned not only with individual consciousness alone, but also with a *ningen's sonzai*, the textures of their social existence. However, while less explicit, a Confucian influence also seems to exist in the dynamic analyzed in this paper. Earlier, I noted Watsuji's interest in Confucianism as developing parallelly to his interest in ethics and the dynamic of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal*, as well as the direct reference he makes to Confucianism's universalistic dimension — both in *Kōshi*, where he frames his argument from this specific stance, and in *Nihon rinri shisōshi*, where he points to Confucianism's function as a *rinrigaku* of sorts before the discipline as such was imported from the West. And although the philosopher himself he does not explicitly identify Confucian ethics as a source of inspiration for his *universal-in-particular* dynamic, he does suggest it elsewhere in *Nihon rinri shisōshi*, when discussing the works of Edo Confucians Nakae Tōjū and Kumazawa Banzan:

> 'The third notable thing is (Banzan's) clear understanding of the *universal* and the *particular*. The Way is the Heavenly Way of the universe (天地の神道), and it does not differ from one country to another. Even if it differs in the way of grasping it or in the way of naming it, 'the substance is the *same* Heavenly Way of the universe.' To argue whether this is the way of the Chinese saints or the way of the Japanese imperial lineage, is the same as claiming that the days and months — which are the same for all of us — belong (only) to our country. The same principle exists simultaneously in the Way of the Chinese Saints, the Way of the Japanese imperial lineage, or the Way of the Great Void (*taixu*). The fact that in Japan the imperial lineage has continued uninterrupted, while in China the revolutionary principle of monarch expulsion (*hōbatsu kakumei*) has ap-

peared do not represent differences in the essence of the (universal) Way, but mere differences in national character (*kunigara*). […] In Banzan's writings, what Tōjū called "a mark that changes depending on place" (*tokoro ni yotte shina kawaru ato*) is emphasized as the realization of the Way which responds to the milieu it emerges in.'[18]

Taken together, these elements seem to suggest Watsuji's strong commitment to the universalistic dimension of Confucianism throughout the development of his philosophy of ethics in his later career, and more specifically in the development of his dynamic of the *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal*.

Regarding the reasons for Watsuji's turn to Confucianism in his later career, some accounts suggest that it indicated somewhat of a radicalization on the philosopher's part, and his use of Confucianism has been taken as a sign of philosophical acquiescence, if not support, for the totalitarian regime of the prewar period.[19] Yet, Karube Tadashi's 2020 account of *Kōshi* offers a more plausible alternative, one that is also relevant to the thesis of this paper: in his younger days, as he dallied with literature as part of the Shirakaba literary circle, Watsuji often kept company with Natsume Sōseki. It was only in 1925, at 36, that he was appointed to teach Ethics at Kyōto Imperial University, his first step in the academic field and most probably the reason for his career-long interest in ethical philosophy and intellectual history. His later trip to Western Europe, in 1927, also represented a significant influence on his philosophy of ethics. He published *Kōshi* more than ten years later, in 1939, after finishing the first volume of his *Rinrigaku* and four years into his tenure at Tōkyō Imperial University, making it — as mentioned earlier — his first critical biography of his predecessors from the position of 'a cutting-edge ethicist.'[20] It is here where Karube makes an important note on Watsuji's early lack of interest in (or contact with) Confucianism: unlike the intellectuals of the older

generation, Watsuji — although among the best educated intellectuals of his age — had been part of the generation of students educated since primary school in the Meiji educational system. Consequently, his experience of learning *kanbun* at a *kanji juku* had been minimal, naturally depriving him of the direct engagement with the Confucian classics. It also seems that as a student he also did not frequent the Chinese philosophy classes, partially because he would have had to memorize the *Analects* before joining, and partially because of his dislike for the ideology of *kokumin dōtoku,* which had perverted Confucian morality and which was dominating the political and public realms at the time.[21] However, following his later-career interest in ethics, it seems that he also had a change of heart regarding Confucianism, which — as I have also shown here — he came to incorporate into his ethics of *aidagara* and critique of Western philosophy.

It may seem contradictory that Watsuji turned to Confucianism at a time when its ideological use in Japan was at its most insidious, especially given his career-long dislike for *kokumin dōtoku* and its idealogues. This contradiction is also why the possibility of his acquiescence to the militaristic regime cannot be completely set aside. But as Karube's account and my analysis indicate, Watsuji's turn to Confucianism seems to have only happened once he resolved the tension between its universalistic and traditionalistic dimensions, and only once he started clearly differentiating between its philosophical core and its manipulated use by *kokumin dōtoku* ideologues.[22] In this sense, as the essays introduced here suggest, Watsuji's engagement with Confucianism seems to have been limited to its former, *universalistic* dimension.

[1] Piovesana (1962) notes: "If Nishida was considered the thinker who tried to express Oriental metaphysico-logical problems in Western categories, Watsuji may be called his counterpart in the field of ethics." (p. 131).

[2] See, for example, Yamaga Sokō's *Shidō*, which takes a wholistic view of humans and the universe they inhabit — encompassing not only one's social framework, but also everything which is 'external' to the human body — i.e. the universe with all its textures.

[3] For more details, see Mustatea (2021, forthcoming).

[4] Watsuji 2015 (I): 27–8.

[5] Mustatea 2021 (forthcoming). However, examples of scholars discussing the Confucian dimension of Watsuji's *Rinrigaku* are slowly multiplying. To give only two very recent examples, Maraldo (2019) focused on the Confucian dimension of Watsuji's *trust* and *trustworthiness* to offer an alternative interpretation of Watsuji's conceptualization of the state in *Rinrigaku*; Shuttleworth 2019 (conference presentation) discussed the same *Rinrigaku* from the perspective of the Five Confucian relationships.

[6] Watsuji 1996:11.

[7] Watsuji 1996: 9 .

[8] Watsuji 1996:12.

[9] Watsuji 1996:14.

[10] Watsuji 1996:15.

[11] From the standpoint of Cartesian dualism, this seems to be a contradictory and ultimately destructive relationship for the individual, who risks losing themselves in 'society'. This is also one of the main criticisms brought against his philosophy of ethics in the postwar period. See, for example, Bellah's position in his 1965 essay, *Japan's cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsurō*: 'Watsuji, as he himself was later fully aware, made no effective resistance to the tendencies leading Japan to disaster. Indeed, the position which he had worked out he did not give any basis for individual or social resistance. […] The new *gemeinschaft* community which he held up as an ideal was no effective answer to any contemporary Japanese problem and in fact blended easily into the rightist rhetoric which was coming to dominate the country. Similarly, the absolute negativity which Watsuji found at the basis of human existence gave no effective foundation for individual nonconformism. […] Even more fundamental, perhaps, is the lack in Watsuji's system of any universalistic or transcendental standard relative to which individual or social action can be judged.' (Bellah 1965:589)

[12] In terms of the larger framework of ethics as a *universal-in-particular-and-particular-in-universal* type of dynamic, he says the following: 'A *ningen's sonzai* is essentially spatio-temporal. It forms a system of social ethics in some place, and at some period of time. Apart from land and a specific time period, a system of social ethics would turn out to be a mere abstraction. […] family ties occur in the 'home,' connections of neighbors in the 'village,' and links of friendship in their 'town.' And the home, the village, and the town are all burdened with historical tradition and recreate their history day by day.' (Rinrigaku: 25–6).

[13] Although not necessarily mentioned alongside *Rinrigaku* and *Nihon rinri shisōshi*, this essay also occupies a rather important place in Japanese intellectual history; and it is not only because, as Karube 2020 notes, it is 'the first critical biography of his predecessors published by Watsuji in his quality of a cutting-edge ethicist,' (Karube 2020:162) but also because it represents one of the earliest examples of modern philological studies on Confucius (Fujita 2020:10).

[14] Watsuji refers to them — more or less interchangeably — as either the Four Teachers (人類の教師) or the Four Saints (人類の四聖)

[15] So ***not*** representative of the 'traditional' element of that culture, but of the 'creative' one.

[16] Watsuji blames Confucius' disciples for not recognizing or acknowledging the revolutionary aspect of his thought —— he notes here that instead of focusing on the innovative things that Confucius had created, they preferred to focus on the ones he revived and established.
[17] Watsuji takes here the example of Mencius, who approached the Teacher's texts philologically and addressed the contradictions and falsities in it. From Mencius' critical approach to the *Analects*, Watsuji concludes that during that epoch, some 150 years after his death, Confucius' legend was most probably being built, and Mencius was trying to fight this process in order to reveal Confucius himself. In this sense, Watsuji's point here is about the necessity to approach myth critically —— while the idealization process uncovers important universal dimensions of the Teachers' words, it also needs to be approached critically, as it is ultimately a cultural fabrication.
[18] Watsuji 2011: 265–6.
[19] This has been discussed in more detail by Shuttleworth 2019 and Mustatea 2021 (forthcoming).
[20] Karube 2020:162.
[21] Id.:163.
[22] Throughout his career —— including after WWII, when it had become fashionable to recant earlier (and more regime-appeasing) philosophical positions —— , Watsuji did not renounce the idea of a national morality or reverence for the emperor as symbols of cultural unity, or the Confucian elements of his philosophy (these are also among the arguments frequently brought against him by postwar liberal intellectuals). However, his position is markedly different from that of his prewar contemporaries, and his criticism of them always vocal. The major failings he identifies in the philosophical position of the *kokumin dōtokuronsha* is detailed in the concluding chapters of *Nihon rinri shisōshi*: on the one hand, the anachronistic use of Edo-period Confucian ethical concepts to artificially create a simulacrum of nationhood, the failure to separate objective historic study from ideological fabrication (this particular criticism he aims at his teacher, Inoue Tetsujirō), or the failure to understand the dynamic relationship between universal and national ethics (for more details on this specific point, see Sevilla 2017:141–4).

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