



**Anton Luis Sevilla, *Watsuji Tetsurō's Global Ethics of Emptiness: A Contemporary Look at a Japanese Philosopher***

London: Palgrave, 2017, cloth, 258 pages. €119.99 .

ISBN: 978-3319583525.

*Watsuji Tetsurō's Global Ethics of Emptiness* presents a systematic and sustained analysis of the ethical thought conveyed within Watsuji Tetsurō's magnum opus, *Rinrigaku*. As the title suggests, Sevilla advocates that Watsuji's ethics of emptiness is not restricted to an Asian context but serves as a global theory. Composed in five chapters, Sevilla raises four specific research questions: (1) Where do we begin when we think about ethics? (2) Should we think about sociopolitical life from an individual or communal perspective? (3) How do we deal with cultural difference? (4) How do we approach ethics? In addressing these questions, Sevilla seeks to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Watsuji's thought by placing it within a contemporary context. He engages with on-going philosophical disputes such as those between ethics of justice and care, liberalism and communitarianism, moral universalism and particularism, and whether ethical ideas ought to derive from transcendent ideals or everyday life.

Sevilla begins with an excellent academic survey of the literature on Watsuji, including translations and publications from both the West and Japan. He also offers an interpretative framework for existing literature, putting Sakai Naoki's critical reading of Watsuji into dialogue with John Maraldo's positive attempt to understand Watsuji in a contemporary context. In this way, Sevilla could be said to present a "double negation" of the constructive and critical approaches. Through the development of his argument, Sevilla introduces the reader to the on-going debates and in doing so provides a philosophical tour of the literature. Moreover, his text is written in an unassuming and accessible manner which ensures the reader is capable of

following the discussion. Although the target audience of *Watsuji Tetsurō's Global Ethics of Emptiness* are English-speaking Watsuji scholars, Sevilla's monograph is also accessible to those who are unacquainted with Watsuji's ethical thought. Thus, despite offering an original outlook which builds upon the literature, by putting Watsuji into dialogue and debate with contemporary Western theorists, Sevilla also provides an excellent introduction to Watsuji.

The first chapter is largely explicative, with Sevilla offering a genealogical reconstruction of the development of Watsuji's ethical system. In doing so, he provides summaries of many books and essays which have yet to be translated into English. His synopsis includes early and important essays, such as *Ethics as the Study of Ningen*, which help to explain the trajectory of Watsuji's thought. As is well-known within Watsuji-scholarship, the English translation of *Rinrigaku* only features the first of three volumes. Sevilla, however, addresses this academic lacuna by offering a fairly detailed analysis of the latter two volumes. The significance of these overviews is that they provide English readers with a much more comprehensive understanding of Watsuji's system. Many recent publications on Japanese philosophy which discuss Watsuji, such as Robert Carter's *The Kyoto School: An Introduction* (2013), and Steve Bein's chapter in Michiko Yusa's excellent *Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Philosophy* (2017), simply provide overviews of Watsuji's publications which are already available to English-speaking scholars. Sevilla, thus, goes beyond these accounts by providing an exegesis of untranslated texts and by formulating an overall analysis of Watsuji's ethical system.

In the second chapter, Sevilla addresses his first research question – of where to begin ethical thought. Here he focuses on the key concept of *aidagara* in relation to contemporary literature, and raises inconsistencies and internal tensions which arise within Watsuji's development of this concept. In particular, he considers Watsuji's ethical approach in relation to ethics of justice and care, and focuses on the critique of moral individualism. In doing so, he develops Erin McCarthy's position but goes beyond it by also considering Emmanuel Levinas and Jean Luc Nancy. Sevilla also extends Watsuji's thought by connecting it to postmodernism through the concept of difference. Expanding upon his initial account of the second volume of *Rinrigaku* he discusses ethical organizations and situates this in relation to Hegel's ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Although Sevilla discusses how virtues lead to the next level of communal organization, it would have also been beneficial were he to explicate the influence exercised upon Watsuji by Aristotle, whom he is clearly indebted to in his communal account of virtue ethics.

The third chapter continues the critique of moral individualism, but from a socio-political perspective. Focusing on the tensions between individuality and community within the pre-war, mid-war, post-war editions of *Rinrigaku*, Sevilla argues that

Watsuji advocates no less than four models of the relationship between the individual and community. Taking a hermeneutic approach, Sevilla takes pains to demonstrate how the historical and cultural context cause Watsuji to rethink and develop each of these relationships. Placing a heavy emphasis on the political dimension of Watsuji's thought, Sevilla turns to the second research question – as to whether sociopolitical life should be considered from an individual or communal perspective. This then leads into discussion of the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate between Rawls and Habermas. Situating Watsuji in this discussion, Sevilla demonstrates the sense in which Watsuji's sociohistorical development can contribute to the liberal-communitarian debate. And although Sevilla takes Watsuji to be a communitarian, it is argued that his approach can also overcome this dichotomy.

The fourth chapter explicates that which Sevilla takes to be the enduring relevance of Watsuji's thought, namely, the possibility of global ethics. It is also here that he addresses the third question: How do we deal with cultural difference? This question concerns whether we ought to endorse moral universalism or particularism and leads Sevilla to engage with Steven Lukes, Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, and puts Watsuji into dialogue with these sociopolitical theorists by discussing the multiculturalism and communitarian debate. Sevilla's main claim is that Watsuji's method can be used to unify universal and particular moralities. More precisely, Watsuji's ethics is global in the sense that it contains a view of how ethics is localized within cultures and universally understood. Although Sevilla does a good job of situating Watsuji in relation to contemporary literature, Eric Hall has also written on this theme, discussing Watsuji, Taylor and communitarianism, and Sevilla's argument could have been improved were he to have built upon this literature.

In the fifth chapter, Sevilla focuses on the concept of emptiness which pervades Watsuji's thought, and what exactly this entails. In order to explicate, Sevilla begins by noting Watsuji's Buddhist foundations, and the importance of the notions of no-self and dependent arising. Here Watsuji uses the concept of emptiness in the sense of a mystical ultimate truth, and as the ideal of realizing this truth. Watsuji, however, later turns to interpersonal ethics, with his ethics of *aidagara*, and Sevilla notes that whilst he continues to use the concept of emptiness it takes on a different meaning. In relation to *aidagara*, emptiness is understood as a principle of research and a given fact about communal life. Sevilla, however, attempts to weld the semantic inconsistencies between these two approaches by advocating his own interpretation of Watsuji's ethics which he refers to as the "interpretative Buddhist model." It is precisely this which is most original to Sevilla's account and enables him to address the final research question - how do we approach ethics? However, if you wish to learn the answer to this question you will have to procure a copy of the book for yourself!

Overall, Anton Luis Sevilla's monograph, *Watsuji Tetsurō's Global Ethics of Emptiness*, offers a lucidly written, and welcome addition, to the growing literature on Watsuji Tetsurō. The content of Sevilla's book is applicable and beneficial to all levels, from Watsuji scholars, to those who lack any prior knowledge. There are areas which one may wish to see developed further, such as the relationship between Aristotle and virtues, and the discussion on communitarian literature. However, there are limitations to writing a monograph and one has to be selective in that which one includes. In acknowledging these restraints, it is to be appreciated that Sevilla presents a well-focused analysis. Whilst he explains Watsuji's ethical system in a coherent manner, he also contributes to the literature by offering insights into previously untranslated texts. In this respect, Sevilla's publication will doubtlessly enable and encourage the further development of Western scholarship on Watsuji.

Kyle Michael James SHUTTLEWORTH  
*Queens University Belfast*