



# The Social Ontology Implicit in Wittgenstein

Carl M. Johnson

“What is most important is invisible...”  
—Antoine de Saint Exupéry

## Contents:

I. Introduction .....	1
II. Theories of meaning .....	2
A. Meaning as a relationship between words and objects .....	2
B. Meaning of sentences as the compounding of names .....	3
C. Meaning as the truth conditions of sentences .....	5
D. Meaning as the use of a sentence in a language-game .....	6
E. Meaning as socially communicable use .....	8
III. Ontological implications of Wittgenstein .....	12
A. An apology for Wittgensteinian ontology .....	12
B. Anti-realism and the social use theory of meaning .....	14
C. Incipient social dimension of realism in the <i>Tractatus</i> .....	18
IV. Exploring the social ontology of WATSUJI .....	20
A. Language and society .....	20
B. Divergences between Wittgenstein and Watsuji .....	23
C. Ontology .....	26
V. Conclusion .....	29
VI. Bibliography .....	30

## I. Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein is widely studied as a logician and philosopher of language, but the metaphysics implicit in his thought has been less well explored. There are two reasons for this. The first and most obvious is his own repeated denouncement of outsized philosophical ambition. According to Wittgenstein, “Philosophy is ‘purely descriptive’”<sup>1</sup> and “Philosophy only states what everyone admits.”<sup>2</sup> The second impediment to would-be metaphysicians attempting to enlist Wittgenstein is the hyper-discursive style of his later works. In these works, Wittgenstein clearly seeks to challenge his readers with a thoroughly Socratic method rather than to exposit a specific doctrine.

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Blue Book,” p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §599.

Thus, an exegete of Wittgenstein must expend considerable effort in merely discerning his opinion, leaving little space to explore the ontological ramifications of his positions.

In spite of these two not inconsiderable difficulties, this paper will attempt to sketch a portrait of the social ontology that is implicit in his work, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*. First, I will explain the reasons that Wittgenstein adopts his famous dictum that “meaning is use” and their consequences. With this background in place, further work by Michael Dummett will elucidate the picture of the world which we are compelled to accept if we take such a view of language. Finally, the work of WATSUJI Tetsurō will be used to present one example of what such an ontology could look like.

## **II. Theories of meaning**

### **A. Meaning as a relationship between words and objects**

There are several kinds of “meaning” to explore in connection with the *Philosophical Investigations*. At the beginning of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein’s chief concern is to critique a model of the meaning of words that he associates with Augustine and his own *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In a name-object model of language, “every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.”<sup>3</sup> Wittgenstein attacks this model of the meaning of words with at least two major lines of objection. The first is that there are many kinds of words for which this model of language cannot account. For example, he presents the problem of the meaning of the word “five” in “five red apples.” If we attempt to understand the word five using the object model, we are driven to ask the wrong questions about it:

What is the meaning of the word “five”?—No such thing is in question here, only how the word “five” is used.<sup>4</sup>

That is to say, if we look for something in the world that corresponds with “five” or “fiveness,” we will be disappointed, but if we merely concern ourselves with the ques-

---

<sup>3</sup>. *Ibid.*, §1.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.*

tion of how the term “five” is used, we will be able to answer all of our own relevant questions.

The second major problem for the object model of language is that it is not clear how it is possible for a word to “connect” with its object. If words are to be directly correlated with objects, then we might suppose that it might be enough to use simple ostensive definitions in which we define a word by pointing at its object. However, as Wittgenstein shows the process of ostensive definition is fraught with philosophical difficulties, since all such definitions are dogged by a problem of interpretation: What exactly is being “pointed out”? Even if one tries to dodge the difficulty by circumscribing the interpretive field through qualifiers like “this color” and so forth, the difficulty remains, since the qualification process must bottom out somewhere, as an infinite regress of ostensive definitions is not possible for human beings.<sup>5</sup> In order to understand an ostensive definition, one must have knowledge of “how to do something with it.”<sup>6</sup>

The conclusion that Wittgenstein reaches from both of these lines of critique is summarized in §43,

For a *large* class of cases—though not all in which we employ the word “meaning” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.

And the *meaning* of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its *bearer*.

Hence, the meaning of an individual word is best conceived of as a series of “family resemblances” between related uses of that word. While some names are capable of being explained ostensively, this is only possible within a larger context, and not all words are names that can be assigned to objects through such a simple process.

## **B. Meaning of sentences as the compounding of names**

If it is the case that knowing the use of a word is frequently the best way to understand its meaning, then this should lead us to reconsider the ways in which the meanings of

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, §29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, §31.

different words are united in a sentence. The traditional view holds that a sentence is nothing but a joining together of names into a unity that refers to the state of the external world. For example, Wittgenstein quotes Plato's Socrates in *Theatetus*, "the names of elements become descriptive language by being compounded together. For the essence of speech is in the composition of names."<sup>7</sup> However, if the meaning of the names is how we use them rather than what they refer to, we must examine our usage to see if it is merely a process of compounding or something different. There are two difficulties with supposing that mere compounding captures the meaning of sentences. First, for reasons analogous to those that challenged the ability of ostensive definition to be used the object model of language, it is not clear that the concept of "compounding" can be understood without an interpretive framework to explain how the component names are related to one another and what about them is compound and what is simple.<sup>8</sup> Second, it is not clear that in our own usage of language, a sentence about the parts of a compound is equivalent to a sentence about the whole. For example,

Suppose that instead of saying, "Bring me the broom," you said, "Bring me the broomstick and the brush which is fitted to it."!—Isn't the answer: "Do you want the broom? Why do you put it so oddly?"—Is he going to understand the further analyzed sentence better?<sup>9</sup>

To the contrary, Wittgenstein feels that for many situations the analyzed form is markedly inferior to the unanalyzed form. After all, the broomstick and the brush are useless unless they are united. One doesn't want to be handed a broomstick and a brush. One wants a proper broom. In general, when comparing an analyzed and unanalyzed sentence, the analyzed form,

seduces us into thinking that the former is the more fundamental form; that it alone shows what is meant by the other, and so on. For example, we think: If you have only the unanalyzed form you miss the analysis; but if you know the analyzed form that gives you everything.—But may I not say that an aspect of the matter is lost on you in the *latter* case as well as the former?<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, §46.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, §48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, §60.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, §63.

### C. Meaning as the truth conditions of sentences

Thus, the word is not the only realm in which the meaning of language is to be drawn out. In some (possibly many) cases, the sentence is as fundamental to the meaning as the word. However, even by turning to the unanalyzed sentence and seeking its meaning in its reference to facts about the world rather than its words referring to objects in the world, the problem of meaning is not resolved. Unfortunately, as Wittgenstein had already concluded in the *Tractatus*, if the truth conditions of sentence are its meaning, then all tautologies have the same meaning, since they all have the same truth condition—any condition whatsoever. Similarly, all logically false sentences have the same truth condition—no condition whatsoever. If this is true, then there can be no purpose for ever introducing either a tautology or a contradiction, since they convey no information. “I know nothing about the weather when I know that it is either raining or not raining.”<sup>11</sup> However since Wittgenstein also argues that “If a sign is *useless*, it is meaningless. That is the point of Occam’s maxim,”<sup>12</sup> we are forced to conclude that,

Tautologies and contradictions are not pictures of reality. They do not represent any possible situations. For the former admit *all* possible situations, and the latter *none*.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, any tautologies or contradictions are meaningless. This result, though counter-intuitive, might be acceptable if were not for the corollary that follows from it. If it is meaningless to speak in tautologies or contradictions, then any explanation of logic itself is meaningless, since

Not only must a proposition of logic be irrefutable by any possible experience, but it also must be unconfirmable by any possible experience.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, the *Tractatus* itself is meaningless, since it attempts to explain the laws of logic. Wittgenstein explicitly acknowledges this in its penultimate proposition, 6.54,

---

<sup>11</sup>. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.461.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibid.*, 3.328.

<sup>13</sup>. *Ibid.*, 4.462.

<sup>14</sup>. *Ibid.*, 6.1222.

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them.

This is why in the preface the reader is warned that, “this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, at the same time, it is reasonable to ask if “a thought is a proposition with a sense”<sup>16</sup> then how can one have “meaningless thoughts” of the kind engendered by the *Tractatus*?

#### **D. Meaning as the use of a sentence in a language-game**

While Wittgenstein was willing to embrace the meaninglessness of meta-logic in the *Tractatus*, by the time of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he seems to have come around to the view that there can be correct and incorrect explanations of language (or at least useful and non-useful), hence, it is not profitable to call sentences without truth conditions “meaningless” if they do in fact possess different modes of use. While one could propose that the meaning of language is captured by a narrow definition, it is like insisting that “All tools serve to modify something”: One can preserve that definition by inventing the justification that the glue-pot modifies the shape of the glue, but why should one preserve a provisional definition at the cost of the significance of the term?<sup>17</sup> Similarly, we need to be prepared to ask if the definition of meaning of sentences as their truth conditions is really broad enough to do the work for which we are employing it.

By supposing that sentences are meant to refer to the conditions of facts in the world, we encounter many difficulties for our understanding of language. For example, we will be unable to understand questions without distorting their meaning. We might suppose that questions could be understood by transposing them (“I want to know if it is raining,” for “Is it raining?” and the like), however, this activity completely covers over important differences between the two kinds of expressions. Questioning and declaring

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §14.

are two different language-games, and rephrasing a question as a declaration, “does not bring the different language-games any closer together.”<sup>18</sup> In any event, questioning is just one such alternative language-game, and many others could be listed in its place with greater or lesser ease of transposition, eg. giving orders, speculating, joking, solving arithmetic problems, requesting, thanking, cursing, play-acting, etc., etc.<sup>19</sup> Thus, for the sentence as well as the word, meaning is to be found in the way it is used in a language-game rather than its correspondence to some aspect of reality, be it truth conditions or observer independent facts.

Thus, Wittgenstein turns his attention to the variety of language-games that ordinary people employ. However, as his investigation proceeds along these lines, Wittgenstein repeatedly encounters what I call “the problem of invisibles.” If the meaning of a sentence is its use by a competent speaker of a speaker of the language of the sentence, then one must conclude that the speakers of that language have the ability to differentiate between the correct and incorrect application of the sentence in question. However, many sentences seem to rely on the existence either of observer independent entities that the individual cannot speak about with certainty or of private entities about which the individual can speak with certainty but to which the community has no epistemic access. In both cases, the entities in question are “invisible” to a segment of society, which leads us to wonder how it is that these entities can be employed usefully by language. As Wittgenstein remarks in “Lectures on Aesthetics,”

How did we learn, “I dreamt so and so?” The interesting point is that we didn’t learn it by being shown a dream.<sup>20</sup>

Once again, we see that ostensive definitions are not sufficient to show us the meanings of certain words. Thus, we may conclude that we learn the meaning of “to dream” from

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, §24.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, §23.

<sup>20</sup> “Lectures on Aesthetics,” I. 5 (p. 2).

its use. But how can we use a word that refers to something that we are not able to show others? What can be the difference in use for you between my having a dream and my not having a dream? Consideration of these difficulties leads to a refinement of the understanding of meaning as the use of a sentence.

### **E. Meaning as socially communicable use**

There are many examples of the problem of invisibles that are explored in *Philosophical Investigations*, among them rule following, negation, memories, possibilities, probabilities, potentials, expectations, colors, confidence, souls, consciousness, pain, imaginability, arithmetic, sensations, understanding, reading, volition, sense of self, sense of time, etc., etc. Of these many problems, perhaps the most remarked upon in the secondary literature is the private language argument. In this argument, Wittgenstein denies the possibility of a truly private language on the following grounds: Suppose there is a language in which the words refer to sensations that only one individual knows about or can possibly know. In that case, the language is by definition, unteachable and incommunicable for others. However, this leaves the use conditions of the language in doubt. "Is it to be assumed that you invent the technique of using the words; or that you found it ready-made?"<sup>21</sup> If one invents the use technique oneself, then there is no way of telling if one is actually using it correctly or not. If the technique is "ready-made" then it is either based on a physical regularity in the world or an intuition (preferably an infallible one). However, if it is based on a physical regularity, it is not truly an in principle private language. It merely happens to be a personal language. On the other hand, if it is based on an intuition without any outside means of testing, it would be untrustworthy. Even if the intuition is in fact reliable, nothing about itself could show itself to be so.

It is easy to simply say that Wittgenstein is rejecting the possibility of a private language and challenging our understanding of the many other kinds of invisibles

---

<sup>21</sup>. *Philosophical Investigations*, §262.



merely because he is an extreme behaviorist or positivist. However, Wittgenstein himself rejects the charge and the dichotomy that supports it. To the contrary, Wittgenstein dismisses the possibility of private languages precisely in order to save the objectivity of other invisible objects that a behaviorist might slice off with Occam's razor.

What do psychologists record?—What do they observe? Isn't it the behavior of human beings, in particular their utterances? But *these* are not about behavior.

"I noticed that he was out of humor." Is this a report about his behavior or his state of mind? ("The sky looks threatening": is this about the present of the future?) Both; not side-by-side, however, but about the one *via* the other.<sup>22</sup>

For Wittgenstein, the existence of invisibles is not separate from their outward expression. The invisible not only shows itself through the visible, but the invisible and the visible are bound together inseparably. Hence the project that Wittgenstein engages in when grappling with the problem of invisibles is not the behaviorist's project of exposing the unreality of the invisible but a project of exposing the insufficiency of our understanding of its mode of existence.

"Are you not really a behaviorist in disguise? Aren't you at bottom really saying that everything except human behavior is fiction?"—If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction.<sup>23</sup>

The trouble for Wittgenstein is that, "We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided."<sup>24</sup> This leaving be is a fatal flaw, since it covers over the essential obscurity of the entities in question. We will not later gain greater clarity about the entities in question, because the entities only exist for the purposes of creating a kind of clarity for our use. They are grammatically constructed, and though they appear to be by definition private, they really only have meaning in so far as they are publicly discernible. It is fine to speak of a *personal* language, for example, but if a language is in principle not publicly communicable (a *private* language), then it is without the conditions that lead to meaning. About invisible entities like pain, we can say that they are,

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, V (p. 153).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, §307.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, §308.

not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here.

The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please.<sup>25</sup>

The problem is we act as though it were acceptable for our spoken language to be ill-defined, because it is a mere translation from a purer language of thought in which the connections between names and objects is clearer, “as if our thinking were founded on a thought-schema: as if we were translating from a more primitive language.”<sup>26</sup> However, if we attempt to use our concept of “thinking” to solve the philosophical problems that plague speech, “thinking” itself must be of an entirely different character from speech in order to evade the pitfalls of speech, which only introduces new problems. Hence, Wittgenstein concludes, “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria.”<sup>27</sup> That sensations are by definition private makes the language about our them stand in greater need of external justification, not lesser. To insist that one has special access to these sensations that renders justification unnecessary is hubris. Speaking of our visual sensations, for example, Wittgenstein remarks,

The ‘visual room’ is the one that has no owner. I can own it as little as I can walk about it, or look at it, or point to it. Inasmuch as it cannot be any one else’s it is not mine either. In other words, it does not belong to me *because* I want to use the same form of expression about it as about the material room in which I sit. The description of the latter need not mention an owner, in fact it need not have any owner. But then the visual room *cannot* have any owner. “For” —one might say—“it has no master, outside or in.”<sup>28</sup>

A good illustration of the publicly accessible nature meaning is given by the contemporary philosopher, Michael Dummett. In “The Social Character of Meaning,” he points out that,

[A]n idiolect is not a language; there is no describing any individual’s employment of his words without account being taken of his willingness to subordinate his use to that generally agreed as

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, §304.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, §597.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, §580.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, §398.

correct. That is, one cannot so much as explain what an idiolect is without invoking the notion of a language considered as a social phenomenon.<sup>29</sup>

Sociality is a basic characteristic of language and inseparable from our conception of it. As an example, Dummett shows that Hilary Putnam's "elm"/"beech" problem demonstrates that ordinary users of language expect their use of words with technical meanings to be judged with regard to their conformity to the usage of those terms by individuals with more authoritative knowledge of the ways in which such words are used. Thus, it is proper to allow that an ordinary person knows what the word "elm" means, even if they are not aware of the defining characteristics of elm as a particular species of tree, so long as they are aware that it is a tree and botanists or other experts should be consulted to determine whether or not a particular tree is an elm. The individual's "knowledge" about the meaning of elm can be limited to the knowledge that certain other groups of people have a better claims to knowledge about elm trees, but this still "counts" as understanding the meaning of the term, since it shows an understanding of how the term is used in a social context.

As Wittgenstein suggests, it is incorrect to think, "Once you know *what* the word stands for, you understand it, you know its whole use."<sup>30</sup> To the contrary, one can possess only enough of the use to know how to get the rest of the use and still count as having an understanding. If knowing what the word stands for were enough, it would not be possible to learn anything on hearing "the morning star is the evening star," since you can only understand the words "morning star" and "evening star" if you know their object, and you can only know the object if you know that it is the same as itself. To the contrary however, it is possible to be able to identify the morning star in the morning and the evening star in the evening without knowing what it is that is the object of these two acts of identification.

---

<sup>29</sup>. "Social Character of Meaning," p. 425.

<sup>30</sup>. *Philosophical Investigations*, §264.

Similarly, the term “gold” has both ordinary and expert applications. Under ordinary circumstances, “gold is a yellow metal,”<sup>31</sup> but as Dummett explains “in certain critical cases [...] what we all know becomes insufficient to distinguish gold from other thing, and [...] appeal has to be made to specialists.”<sup>32</sup> What is interesting about “gold” is that the way in which the technical term is employed has undergone revision as atomic theory, etc., has increased our knowledge of the structure of the physical world. That is, previously, “gold” was anything that would pass an assayer’s test, but now the atomic number of the element is a defining trait, rather than its chemical reactivity. Thus, “the adoption of technical means for distinguishing gold from other substances involves some alteration in the sense of ‘gold’ [...]”<sup>33</sup>

Wittgenstein, like Dummett, sees language as a primarily social activity: “to imagine a language is to imagine a life-form”<sup>34</sup> and “the *speaking* of language is a part of an activity, or of a life-form.”<sup>35</sup> It is the lived inter-subjectivity of a form of life that creates the verification conditions that allow words and sentences—even those about “invisible” objects—to have definite uses and meanings, in spite of the wide variety of language-games that we play.

### **III. Ontological implications of Wittgenstein**

#### **A. An apology for Wittgensteinian ontology**

Before attempting to sketch the ontological ramifications of adopting Wittgenstein’s paradigm of meaning as use, it is necessary to give a brief defense of metaphysics from what appears to be a recurrent rejection of such in works of Wittgenstein from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*.

There are several major categories to Wittgenstein’s critique of philosophy. First, philosophy is not an especially useful activity. As he writes in the preface to *Tractatus*,

---

<sup>31</sup>. As we learned from Kant’s *Prolegomena*, 267.

<sup>32</sup>. “Social Character of Meaning,” p. 426.

<sup>33</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>34</sup>. *Philosophical Investigations*, §19.

<sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.*, §23.

even after philosophical problems are resolved, what is remarkable about them is “how little is achieved when these problems are solved.”<sup>36</sup> The reason for this according to the *Investigations* is that,

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.

One might also give the name “philosophy” to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions.<sup>37</sup>

Second, the majority of the philosophical questions that are raised are meaningless. Hence, “Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical.”<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, “All philosophy is critique of language.”<sup>39</sup> Third, one reason for this failure is that philosophers fail to restrict themselves to the “correct method in philosophy” which is “to say nothing except what can be said.”<sup>40</sup> (Hence, according to the view of the *Tractatus*, statements about logic, etc. that are off limits should be “passed over in silence.”) Fourth, according to the *Investigations*, another major cause of “philosophical disease” is “an unbalanced diet: one nourishes one’s thinking with only one kind of example.”<sup>41</sup> This leads to bewitchment by language and gives Wittgenstein his philosophical goal: “To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.”<sup>42</sup>

How can we avoid falling prey to these criticisms in our attempt to construct a Wittgensteinian ontology? First, we must acknowledge that our ontology is a description of possible descriptions of the world given our human forms of life, not of the world itself. Ontology is merely another language-game, and thus, it cannot force itself on reality. “The study of what is” is indistinguishable from the study of what we say is, of

---

<sup>36.</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* p. 4

<sup>37.</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §126.

<sup>38.</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.003.

<sup>39.</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.0031.

<sup>40.</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.53.

<sup>41.</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §593.

<sup>42.</sup> *Ibid.*, §309.

what we find useful to speak about. Though we may say that a particular state of affairs would be contradictory or otherwise impossible according to our ability to describe reality, reality has no compulsion to restrict itself to being in itself the kind of thing that we can describe. This does not mean that ontology is not an important means of clarifying our thinking about the world or a valuable means of generating new ways of thinking about the world, but it does mean that we must not confuse together how the world appears to us, how the world must appear to us, and how the world is apart from us.

Second, we must be aware that as a language-game, ontology only makes sense as the activity of a linguistic community. Accordingly, a Wittgensteinian ontology must be one that reflects the axiological structure of the form of life held by that community. The ontology must be useful in some way if it is to be a meaningful language-game, and as the language-game that describes possible language-games of interest to a particular community, it must be capable of explaining the ways that the values of that community are preserved through the variety of possible language-games that the community could employ. While, again as per the first consideration, this does not have a bearing on how the world actually is, it is intimately tied up with the ways in which the community is capable of talking about the world.

### **B. Anti-realism and the social use theory of meaning**

Dummett in "What Does the Appeal to Use Do for the Theory of Meaning?" examines what role truth conditions can share in the meaning of propositions once we take the stance that meaning relies upon social use. One might ordinarily suppose that whether a proposition is true or not depends on whether or not the proposition in question actually conforms to facts about reality, and that this truth of the matter is something "beyond" whether the conventions of the language being spoken its users might be expected to agree with the proposition. However, according to Dummett,

to attribute to us a grasp of the condition for a sentence to be true, under such a transcendental notion of truth, violates the principle that meaning is use: for a knowledge of the condition for the truth of a sentence of this kind cannot be fully manifested by the use the speaker makes of it<sup>43</sup>

Thus, if we are to retain the definition of meaning as use, then the term truth cannot be taken to be something which is entirely separate from our ability to recognize it. Hence, ontology and epistemology become intertwined at the level of language. This seems to have the deeply disturbing implication that there is nothing “beyond convention” which dictates whether or not language is used correctly. There is no fact of the matter about whether a proposition is correct or not, and worse, there cannot be such a thing as facts of the matter, since even if there were, our language would not be able to direct its hearer to anything so useless as what is true independently of any use we may have for it. However, in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein does not see the implications of this aspect of use theory as being quite so starkly conventionalistic:

241. “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and false?” —It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

242. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. [...]

That is, the truth or falsity of a proposition is not determined by human assent to the proposition alone, but the existence of the proposition as a meaningful inquiry about the world or as something that even could be true or false, is dependent on a tightly woven network of human agreements about what kind of place the world is, and this network is encoded into our language-games as the product of a form of life. As he writes elsewhere, “what we do in our language-game always rests on a tacit presupposition.”<sup>44</sup> For example, just as the question, “Have you stopped beating your wife?” supposes that one has a wife who one has beaten in the past, so too the question, “Is it raining or not?” suppose innumerable other things about what it means for their to be

---

<sup>43</sup>. “What Does the Appeal to Use Do for the Theory of Meaning?” p. 113.

<sup>44</sup>. *Philosophical Investigations*, V (pg. 153).

rain. These other things are not merely the provisional definitions about what the word “rain” means, but questions about how one goes about deciding that the weather conditions are in agreement with the definition or not. This question of rule following cannot be resolved by adding a stipulative heuristic, since the question at hand is precisely how it is that such stipulations are to be followed. One example that Wittgenstein gives of the tacit presuppositions embodied by our language-games is the process by which we refine a measurement of length. Certainly, it is true that over time it is possible to produce increasingly accurate rules and measures. However, this refinement process is only possible because of certain presuppositions are a part of the very process of measuring.

To say “The height of Mont Blanc depends on how one climbs it” would be queer. And one wants to compare ‘ever more accurate measurements of length’ with the nearer and nearer approach to an object. But in certain cases it is, and in certain cases it is *not* clear what “approaching nearer to the length of an object” means. What “determining the length” means is not learned by learning what *length* and *determining* are; the meaning of the word “length” is learned by learning, among other things, what it is to determine length.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, the fact that physical objects have lengths is a fact only in relation to a human system of assumptions and context which gives the words “physical objects have lengths” a meaning. This reverses the priority of what is and what we can know. To apply Wittgenstein’s theory to an example from another philosopher, when discussing the limits of experience, Kant declares that “I would indeed bet all that I own—if this matter could be established through some experience—that there are inhabitants on at least one of the planets we see.”<sup>46</sup> In this case, even in Kant’s time, there is a clear means by which the question could be settled in theory if not in practice: travel to another planet and observation of its inhabitants. Thus, there would have been a “truth of the matter” even if rocketry had never become sophisticated enough to send probes to those planets. However, the fact that there was a truth of the matter about these questions even in the

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, XI (p. 188).

<sup>46</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, B853.



absence of interplanetary rocketry is a function of the existence of a way of life in which such experiences as “traveling to a distant location and observing the flora and fauna there (if any)” are already well understood. The definitive nature of a proposition rests not on the fact that it is a proposition but on the fact that within a particular way of life such a proposition is considered answerable. Of course, to say that propositions are only sometimes definitive is an implication of the theory of meaning as use that leads us to potential troubling conclusions about the law of the excluded middle. Dummett first considers a naïve look at the implications of use theory for the principle of bivalence:

What would one say “Either he *is* your brother or he *isn't*” (for example) *for*? Well, it is tantamount to saying, “There must be a definite answer: there are no two ways about it.” [...] The utterance of that instance of the law of the excluded middle is an expression of the conviction that the sentence “He is your brother” has a *definite* sense. That, therefore, is the meaning of the sentence “Either he is your brother or he isn't”: that is its *use* in language.<sup>47</sup>

This vision of the law of the excluded middle’s role in language is clearly too limited, as Dummett acknowledges, but it does get at some of the implications of use theory for logic. In this case, the typical use of the law of the excluded middle is not aimed at the uncovering of truth conditions, but at the more pragmatic aim of forcing clarity on someone who desires to be unclear. However, can the more general aim for the law of the excluded middle—the insistence that all well formed and meaningful propositions have a truth value—be sustained under use theory? Dummett sees the middle and late Wittgenstein as engaged in a project of bringing to our attention the fact that,

language contains many sentences for which we know no procedure, even in principle, which will put us in a position to assert or deny that sentence, at least with a full justification. Indeed, for many such sentences, we have no ground for supposing that there necessarily exists any means whereby we could recognize the sentence as true or false, even means of which no effective method of availing ourselves. Hence a notion of truth for such a sentence, taken as subject to the principle of bivalence, cannot be equated with the existence of a means of justifying an assertion of it [...] Therefore, if meaning is use, that is, if the knowledge in which a speaker’s understanding of a sentence consists must be capable of being fully manifested by his linguistic practice, it appears that a model of meaning in terms of truth-conditions is possible only if we constitute truth in such a way that the principle of bivalence fails; and this means, in effect, some notion of truth under which the truth of a sentence implies the possibility, in principle, of *our* recognizing its truth. It is

---

<sup>47</sup>. “What Does the Appeal to Use Do for the Theory of Meaning?” p. 106.

hard to swallow such a conclusion, because it has profound metaphysical repercussions: it means that we cannot operate, in general, with a picture of our language as bearing a sense that enables us to talk about a determinate, objective reality which renders what we say determinately true or false independently of whether we have the means to recognize its truth or falsity.<sup>48</sup>

Hence, use theory does away the definite sense of proposition. A proposition cannot be counted on to be either true or false. That a particular proposition has the property of bivalence is merely a function of the happenstance that within a particular range of applications (a language-game) the question is theoretically resolvable. If we define “anti-realism” in general by saying that in an anti-realist understanding of X the meaning of statements about X cannot be its truth conditions but must be its verification conditions, then we must conclude that the later Wittgenstein’s theory of language commits us to being anti-realists about language, and since any ontology must be a comprehensible description of the world created and expressed using human language, then a truly Wittgensteinian ontology must either take an anti-realist position concerning the reality of objects or suggest a means of conducting ontology other than language. The anti-realism implicit in Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning does not come about because of some conclusion that has been drawn from the careful observation of the physical world, but due to the simple fact that there is no other available means for us to talk about the world.

### **C. Incipient social dimension of realism in the *Tractatus***

Interestingly, some of these anti-realist implications in the later Wittgenstein are also present in an embryonic form in his earlier writing. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein declares, “*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*”<sup>49</sup> This proposition was never explicitly renounced by the later Wittgenstein and must remain a key principle for any Wittgensteinian ontology. However, the implications of this phrase do change in the later Wittgenstein, since the meaning of “language” and its limits changes. For

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>49</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6.

the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, a language is the “totality of propositions.”<sup>50</sup> However, by the time of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein’s conception of language had changed, as shown above. If language fixes the limits of my world, but language is no longer a means by which relations between objects in the world are set forth definitively, then the kinds of things that language can talk about become radically different, and so too must the limits on the world imposed by that language change.

The foremost change that Wittgenstein’s shift causes is that since language is not private (“is not an idiolect,” in Dummett’s characterization), the boundaries imposed on my world are not private either. The limits of my world are what we share in common. It is only in the relationships between individuals in a community that words take on meaning, hence the extent to which language succeeds at directing our attention at certain objects or fail to bring other objects into conceivability is governed by the ways in which different individuals share a use for their language. While of course the picture of language presented in the *Tractatus* is quite different from that of the *Investigations*, it is intriguing to note that even in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argues against the possibility of solipsism on the grounds that

solipsism when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it.<sup>51</sup>

Hence we can see that even in the early Wittgenstein, there is a sense in which although “the world is *my* world,”<sup>52</sup> this nevertheless entails a certain amount of interrelation between selves in order to keep the world from collapsing in on itself. It is only in the context of the existence of both self and other that the word “self” has any meaning, hence even if the solipsist were right, there would be nothing for the solipsist to be right

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.001.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.62.

about. Though this is not a full-fledged anticipation of the private language argument, it is an intriguing parallel claim about the necessity of the world's being shared.

#### **IV. Exploring the social ontology of WATSUJI**

Having preformed this initial investigation into Wittgenstein's theory of meaning and the ontology implicit in it, it is interesting to look at other philosophers to see if a fuller expression of project that Wittgenstein started can be found elsewhere. One philosopher with notable parallels to Wittgenstein is his contemporary, the Japanese philosopher WATSUJI Tetsurō (和辻哲郎, 1889–1960).

There are three areas in which to compare Watsuji to Wittgenstein. The first is the area in which they are in agreement. This area is worth considering because it shows the degree to which the two figures have comparable goals and overlapping conclusions. The second area is that of divergence. The places where Watsuji disagrees with Wittgenstein are interesting to consider, because they show us how a thinker with an otherwise similar view of the world can draw different conclusions about it. The final area to examine is the area in which the one speaks and the other is silent. This area will suggest to us ways in which the thought of the silent can be filled out by the thought of the speaker as a continuation of their shared project once we take into account the grounds on which they disagree. In this paper, the first area is represented by the consideration of Watsuji's view of language and society, which largely overlaps with Wittgenstein's. The second area is represented by Watsuji's view of ethics, which has a greater emphasis on the social dimension of morality than does Wittgenstein's. The third area is represented by Watsuji's view of ontology, an area in which Wittgenstein is largely silent.

##### **A. Language and society**

One key similarity between Watsuji and Wittgenstein is Watsuji's approach toward meaning. While Watsuji does not explicitly endorse a theory of meaning as use, he comes quite close to it in places. For example, in his *Rinrigaku* (倫理學, ethics), he writes,

With regard to any meaning whatsoever, we must examine its certificate of birth in the realm of practical understanding.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, for example, when Watsuji examines the nature of common sense, he gives the very ordinary example of talking about the weather and explores the question of the purpose for which we discuss it.

When friends come upon each other, they remark on the weather. This is the common sense of [human beings]. They do not reflect on the reason why they speak of the weather. When they speak of it, they know that they do not concern themselves with knowledge of the weather but only the mutual relationships thereby expressed. [...] Why do people talk about the weather? Because the weather is nothing other than a mood of subjective [existence]; that is, an expression of one's "state of mind."<sup>54</sup>

For Watsuji, the reason that meanings like these are to be sought in practical understanding is that words are forged in the social realm in spite of their employment being expression by an individual.

No one person has the privilege of declaring that she alone has created [a word]. In spite of this, for everyone, words are one's own. [...] Therefore, when its structure takes form in consciousness, its origin is not derived merely from individual existence, even though its content exists *in* individual consciousness.<sup>55</sup>

This dual nature of words as both personal and communal in turn spills back into our philosophical inquiry and makes asking certain philosophical questions self-defeating. Considering the question of the *cogito*, Watsuji writes,

As our question is already composed of words or signs, even though we keep strictly to ourselves without consulting anybody, then essentially speaking it is already a question that concerns community. We can have no ideas and, hence, can raise no questions without words or signs.<sup>56</sup>

[...]

Therefore, although we can think alone, yet even in this case, we think alone about a communal problem. This fact is revealed by the very phenomenon of secretly "keeping our question in our heart." We need not keep to ourselves something incommensurable that we do not have in common with others. We can safely disclose our secret before a cat.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup>. *Rinrigaku*, p. 37.

<sup>54</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>57</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Here then we see a great deal of commonality between the approach of Watsuji to that of Wittgenstein. They both see the existence of private phenomena and hidden thoughts as dependent on the existence of communicable sensations. Since we do not share our way of life with cats, we cannot fully communicate with them. Similarly, although, for example, the sensation of tasting food is private, there is nevertheless a degree to which the phenomenon of tasting can only be understood in relation to certain social assumptions about the nature of tasting food.

[W]e taste food by dividing it among us. Its taste depends on each person's peculiar sense of taste. In spite of this, is it true to say that tastes differ from one to another? Do we not enjoy the same sweetness when we taste sugar, dividing it among us? If one person tastes sugar and finds it bitter, we would lose no time in finding her a medical care on the assumption that she is sick. We attempt to deal with her as a person who is normally able to taste the same sweetness, although she is temporarily deprived of this ability. Based on the phenomenon that people experience the same taste, "communal eating," has played an important role since ancient times. [...] If it were true that bodily feelings separate people from one another, then such instances could not have occurred.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Watsuji drives us to the conclusion of Wittgenstein quoted above, "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments."<sup>59</sup> Though we may say that only I know what the food tastes like to me, nevertheless, what the food tastes like to me is intimately bound up with what the food tastes like to others. The invisible object of my sense of taste is made visible through our interactions with others. Another example of this phenomenon of common preferences, one shared by Wittgenstein and Watsuji, is that of fashion. Wittgenstein asks,

How does fashion come about? Say, we wear lapels broader than last year. Does this mean the tailors like them better broader? No, not necessarily. He cuts it like this and this year he makes it broader.<sup>60</sup>

It is clear that what makes a fashion the fashion of the moment is not the taste of any individual, be it the taylor or the trendsetter. Rather, what is in fashion is created through

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75–76.

<sup>59</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §242.

<sup>60</sup> "Lectures on Aesthetics," I. 8 (p. 13).

the decisions of many people each of whom influences others. To state “this style is in fashion” is not to make a claim that “I like this style” or even that one should like the style. It is a statement about the mass. As Watsuji explains it is an illustration of the communal consciousness.

What makes this communal consciousness manifest in a particularly bold form, is the phenomenon of “fashion.” Fashion makes its appearance within the modes of clothing, food, and housing already historically and nationally fixed as more detailed common favorites. Even though individuals did not, to begin with, become conscious of a common favorite as their own, nevertheless, they do feel it to be their own favorite to the extent that they are inclined to view deviations from this favorite as either something funny or ugly.<sup>61</sup>

Without any individual awareness, the favorite of the group becomes the favorite of the individual as well. This process does not subvert the fact of individual autonomy of fashion preferences, but does demonstrate the degree to which tastes occur within a social fabric. The social fabric, in turn, demonstrates the wanderings of collective feeling.

## **B. Divergences between Wittgenstein and Watsuji**

While Watsuji and Wittgenstein do share much on the topic of language and the social dimension of thought, there is a clear difference of emphasis between the two on the subject of ethics. For Wittgenstein, ethics refers to something individual which is outside the realm of ordinary discourse. As he writes in the *Tractatus*, “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words./ Ethics is transcendental.”<sup>62</sup> For Wittgenstein, ethics is “nonsense” in that it cannot be put into ordinary language. He explains this position further in “A Lecture on Ethics”:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expression, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond all significant language.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, a Wittgensteinian ethics is “a document of a tendency in the human mind” that “does not add to our knowledge in any sense.”<sup>64</sup> Because ethics itself is transcendental,

---

<sup>61</sup>. *Rinrigaku*, p. 74–75.

<sup>62</sup>. *Tractatus*, 6.421.

<sup>63</sup>. “A Lecture on Ethics,” p. 44.

all that we can do is point to the limits of language and dare our listeners to go beyond them.

For Watsuji, however, ethics is just as socially grounded as language and the many other “invisibles” that inhabit our language. The word “ethics” is generally translated into Japanese as *rinrigaku* 倫理學 (hence the title of the book). *Rin* 倫 has strongly Confucian undertones, since it is identified with *gorin gojō* 五倫五常 (“the moral rules that govern the five human relationships”<sup>65</sup>) and so forth. On the basis of these associations, Watsuji defines *rinrigaku* 倫理學 as,

the order or pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible. In other words, ethics consists of the laws of social existence.<sup>66</sup>

Given such a definition then, it is natural that Wittgenstein and Watsuji should conflict on the subject of “ethics,” since their topics are quite different. In existentialist terminology, Wittgenstein is concerned with the third, religious stage of life, whereas Watsuji is concerned with the second, socio-ethical stage of life. In order to study ethics from this social perspective, Watsuji takes the human being as his basic object of examination. “Human being” is generally translated into Japanese as *ningen* 人間. The word *ningen* was originally a Buddhist term for the realm of human beings,<sup>67</sup> but it was co-opted for service as the translation of the Western concept during the Meiji period. It consists of two characters: 人, which can be read as *nin* or *hito*, means person and 間, which can be read as *gen* or *aida*, means between or a duration. Hence for Watsuji the very words “human being” or “*ningen*” present a picture of the dual nature of humans as both autonomous individuals (人) and the socially connected collectives existing between them (間).

---

<sup>64</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>. *Rinrigaku*, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup>. “Ontological Foundation in Tetsuro Watsuji’s Philosophy,” p. 283, among others.



We described *ningen*, which possesses this dual structure, as something subjective. The implication is that *ningen*, although being subjective communal existence as the interconnection of acts, at the same time, is an individual that acts through these connections.<sup>68</sup>

Ethics then is a kind of social anthropology in which the basic conditions of the collective judgments of society are brought to the fore and refined. It cannot be based simply on what people do and say (this would be mere sociology), but it must be based on the theoretical considerations which underlie the practical acts of members in a society.

Ethics is not a science that deals only with the objective meaning-content of noematic objects; it is a science that deals with human reality. But insofar as it is a science, it is concerned with theory, not with the practical reality as it is. It can be a science only by transforming human reality into *logos*. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the *logos*-like things that are the objects of this science are nothing but indications of subjective realities that are out of reach of any attempt at objectification.<sup>69</sup>

The rest of Watsuji's *Rinrigaku* is an investigation of the "logos-like things" exposed by everyday life in Japan. While there is not sufficient space here to explain Watsuji's investigation thoroughly, one example of his does bear mentioning for its bearing on Wittgenstein's concept of language-games. In Japan, it is customary for doctors to withhold from their patients that they are suffering from a terminal illness. This for example is a key plot point in the Akira Kurosawa film *Ikiru*. Thus, the language-game played by a doctor and patient in Japan might be construed as allowing for doctor to lie.

We often hide the reality of the disease from the patient. To tell a lie of this sort, insofar as it is done as the result of caring about the patient's happiness, is a sort of "truthfulness" toward the patient and, hence, is not a lie. A humane relationship with the patient, and not the mere congruence of the fact of the disease with the word, is the deciding factor between truth and falsehood.<sup>70</sup>

While Wittgenstein does refer to lying as a language-game,<sup>71</sup> there is serious doubt about whether he would agree with Watsuji's assertion that under certain circumstances lying to a patient is not a lie. Nevertheless, if nothing else this view of deliberate untruthfulness can be made to work within the scope of language-games on the grounds that other

---

<sup>68</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>69</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>70</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>71</sup>. *Philosophical Investigations*, §247.

language-games listed by Wittgenstein such as “play-acting” and “telling a joke”<sup>72</sup> have no requirement of factual accuracy.

### C. Ontology

For the reasons noted above, it is difficult to talk about a Wittgensteinian ontology if only for the reason of Wittgenstein’s own persistent pessimism about the prospects of such a project. Nevertheless, our earlier investigation revealed some anti-realist implications to the theory that meaning is use. If these earlier implications were well founded, then we should expect Watsuji—a philosopher contemporary to Wittgenstein and with a similar outlook on the role of language in social interaction but who does address ontology explicitly—to have an anti-realist bent to a degree comparable to the position that was imputed to Wittgenstein above. And indeed, this is precisely what we find.

The word “ontology” is usually translated into Japanese as *sonzaigaku* 存在學. *Gaku* 學, as it does in *rinrigaku* 倫理學, means “the study of.” *Sonzai* 存在 alone is usually translated as “existence” or “to exist.” It is made up of two characters: *Son* 存, to preserve against loss, and *zai* 在, to remain in a particular place. On the basis of this etymology, Watsuji offers the following definition for *sonzai*:

If it is tenable to hold that *son* is the self-sustenance of the self and *zai* means to remain within human relations, then *son-zai* is precisely the self-sustenance of the self as betweenness. That is, it means *ningen* possesses herself. We could also simply say that *sonzai* is “the interconnection of the acts of *ningen*.” Hence, in the strict sense of the word, *son-zai* is applied only to *ningen*.<sup>73</sup>

Due to his defining *sonzai* in this way, Watsuji explicitly states his *sonzaigaku* is not equivalent to the German “Ontologie,” in spite of this being the usual translation.<sup>74</sup> Rather, the ontology of Watsuji unlike that of the West generally is bound up not in what exists per se but what exist in relation to the human realm. That is to say, Watsuji also experiences a collapse between ontology and epistemology. As a result of this—as we have

---

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, §23.

<sup>73</sup> *Rinrigaku*, p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

already seen—Watsuji strongly focuses on the everyday realm as the basis for philosophy:

there is no mine so rich as that which is called the *everyday experience* of human beings. Walking along the street we can find various goods on display shelves. Common sense already has some knowledge of how to classify, how to use, and why to buy them. In addition, there are none of these goods that does not give expression to *ningen's sonzai* in one way or another.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, from this standpoint, we can begin to see why a philosopher with such a keen interest in human relationality and human existence writes so extensively on ethics (*rinrigaku*). Ethics is the theoretical structure of the values of individuals. Accordingly, our ontologies are bound to become entangled with our ethical structures, since the way that we classify objects as existing in the world or not is surely related to the value-structure with which we view the world. Thus, by starting from ordinary things, Watsuji extracts a picture of human existence, and on the basis of this picture of human existence, he refines his anthropological ethic:

what we call the *things of daily life* all offer a passage to *ningen's sonzai*. Therefore, we are able to take our departure from “facts,” taken in the most naïve and ordinary sense of the word. One might gain the impression that what we have enumerated here, as issues to be solved in ethics, takes on an outstandingly metaphysical color. But the passageway that leads to them consists of markedly everyday, ordinary facts. In this sense, our ethics remains in close contact with facts.<sup>76</sup>

Notice again, that while for Wittgenstein ethics is what cannot be accounted for after all the facts are known, for Watsuji, ethics emerges as the very structure of the “facts” themselves—facts which are thoroughly socially determined.

Japanese philosopher and sociologist Isamu NAGAMI (永見勇) in “Ontological Foundation in Tetsuro Watsuji’s Philosophy” provides a clear explanation of an everyday example used by Watsuji to show intertwining of what is and what we know:

Taking the example of a climatic phenomenon of cold, Watsuji asks a question: What is this cold that we feel? “Is it that air of a certain temperature, cold, that is, as physical object, which stimulates the sensory organs in our body so that we as psychological subjects experience it as a certain set mental state?”<sup>77</sup> If this is the case, we have to admit that the “cold” and “we” exist as separate

---

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39–40.

and independent entities as if this “cold” presses upon us. But it is impossible, in existential reality, for us to feel “cold” from the independent existence of the cold. Rather, it is by feeling cold that we discover the cold. Does this mean that feeling cold is a matter of subjective conscious feeling? Watsuji answers “No.” Neither objective nor subjective explanations of “feeling cold” can give a satisfactory answer because both explanations are based on the view of the usual distinction between subject and object, or between the cold and the I.<sup>78</sup>

Hence, the “betweenness” of Watsuji’s philosophy works in both directions. Not only does anti-realism begin to affect the way that we understand the realm of the external things, from the other side it also erodes our sense of ourselves as being separate from the world. Thus, the “epistemology” of Watsuji cannot be simply posit a detached *cogito*. Rather, our consciousness is intrinsically embedded in the world for the very reason that the world is embedded in the consciousness.

The attempt to consider “consciousness” by means of epistemology or psychology originates with the modern ego-consciousness, which divides the individual into body and mind and deals with the mind separately from the body. [...] But the position of the *cogito*, which takes body as mere “matter,” should be submitted to severe criticism. The body is not merely the same as any other object but is basically something subjective. As an observer of phenomena, one’s eye is not matter as an object but is observing as a subject. Even the hand of an acting person is not an objective matter but the hand of an acting person. Moreover, apart from the subjective physical body, no human relationships could arise at all.<sup>79</sup>

This non-dualistic assertion by Watsuji’s philosophy is, of course, linked to the influence on him by Buddhism and the Kyōto School of philosophy. However, Watsuji’s understanding of “emptiness” is not quite the same as others in his milieu. For Watsuji, humans are empty because they express the negation of a negation. As individuals, they cannot exist apart from society, but society itself is an abstract whole devoid of meaning apart from what is given to it by its members. Hence,

the ultimate feature of every kind of wholeness in human beings is “emptiness” and, hence, that the whole does not subsist in itself but appears only in the form of the restriction or negation of the individual. To speak candidly, something whole that precedes individuals and prescribes them as such, namely, such a thing as “the great whole,” does not exist. It is not justifiable for us to insist on the existence of a social group’s independence. In an attempt to come to grips with something whole, we are lead to confront individual persons who are destined to be restricted and negated, contrary to our intention.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup>. Nagami’s footnote 25, “Watsuji, Climate [and Culture], trans. G. Bownas. p. 2.”

<sup>78</sup>. “Ontological Foundation in Tetsuro Watsuji’s Philosophy,” p. 285.

<sup>79</sup>. *Rinrigaku*, p. 152.

While there is more to be said about the social ontology of Watsuji, what has been presented here should serve a sufficient introduction to the kind of thought that can be built on the basis of a Wittgensteinian theory of meaning as use.

## **V. Conclusion**

In this paper, I first showed the reasons for Wittgenstein's adoption of the dictum "meaning is use." Due to the difficulties with the object theory of meaning, it is necessary for us to view language as a series of interrelated "language-games" with a variety of aims. However, in doing so, we run into serious difficulties in explaining the status of various invisible entities such as pain. In order to save these entities, Wittgenstein rules out the possibility of private languages and suggests that instead the existence of *my* pain is tied up with conditions by which *you* would verify it. Michael Dummett, in considering the implications of this proposal concludes that use theory commits us to a kind of anti-realism about the objects to which language refers. This in turn spurs the conclusion that a Wittgensteinian ontology must be one in which our language about the world does not capture the world itself, but something else that arises from our mutual social interaction within the world. In order to better understand what kind of world this might be, I contrasted Wittgenstein with WATSUJI Tetsurō. Watsuji shares with Wittgenstein the tendency to see language as a tool intimately bound up with the form of life that we engage in but differs with Wittgenstein in seeing ethics as social rather than transcendental. The reason for the difference is that for Watsuji, "ethics" refers to the social values that underpin our shared existence in the world. These values in turn are the major prop to the "ontology," which Watsuji constructs. This ontology is one in which, like the ontology to which use theory's anti-realism forces our assent, what is at stake is not so much what exists in itself but the shared uses to which objects can be put to use in

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

our everyday way of life. This social ontology in turn has implications for the way that we see ourselves as embodied individuals and our world as the realm which we inhabit.

## VI. Bibliography

Dummett, Michael. "Social Character of Meaning." *Truth and Other Enigmas*. Gerald Duckworth & Co., London, 1978.

———. "What Does the Appeal to Use Do for the Theory of Meaning?" *The Seas of Language*. Oxford Press, 1996.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis. Originals 1781, 1787; translation 1996.

NAGAMI Isamu. "The Ontological Foundation in Tetsuro Watsuji's Philosophy: Ku and Human Existence." *Philosophy East & West* V. 31 No. 3 (July 1981). pp. 279-296. Available online at <<http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/ew26679.htm>>. Accessed May 2008.

WATSUJI Tetsurō. *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: ethics in Japan*. Trans. Seisaku Yamamoto & Robert Carter. SUNY Press, 1996.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "The Blue Book." *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"*. 2nd ed. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1969.

———. "Lectures on Aesthetics." *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Compiled from notes by Smythies, Rhees, and Taylor. Ed. Cyril Barrett. University of California Press, 1967.

———. *Philosophical Investigations: The German text, with a revised English translation*. 3rd ed. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2001.

———. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness. Routledge, London, 1974.