Peter McCormick
Solicitations

Peter McCormick

Solicitations
Poverties, Discourses, and Limits

For Elžběta and Martin Cajthaml

Contents

Preface

In what is called "Standard English," the word "solicitation" in both ordinary British and American English usage means today mainly "the action of soliciting or seeking to obtain something. . . ."[1] As the title, however, of this companion set of essays in ethics to *Modernities: Histories, Beliefs, and Values* published at the same time, the expression "soliciting" is used more particularly. Thus for the most part "solicitation" here means a person or a group of persons seeking to obtain not just something generally. Rather "solicitation" here means persons' seeking especially some fundamental ethical recognition in their evident destitution by entreating other persons both to recognize and to act upon their shared humanity.[2]

This more particular sense corresponds to the now globalized awareness of very great numbers of persons today still continuing to suffer not just from poverty but from extreme poverty or destitution. Despite however the general decrease in the number of persons suffering from poverty, the number of those suffering from destitution has, as Essay Three below documents, largely remained stable. That is, the nature of the situations of very many persons persists in soliciting the moral and ethical effective concern of almost all.

Responding not inappropriately to such solicitations in sufficient measure however would seem to require second thoughts about the nature of human beings and persons as fundamentally contingent beings. Such responses moreover would also seem to insist on distinguishing sharply between the moral and the ethical, between roughly what is mainly a matter of obligation and what is mainly a matter of value. Trying to understanding these matters less generally is the main point of the introductory and concluding essays about situations in Japan and the Sudan outside the more usual range of Western European reflection, together with the pairs of essays gathered in each of the three sections below.

In sum, after an introductory investigation of some of the salient differences between communities in East Asian countries like Japan in contrast with those in Western European countries, a first section "Moral Solicitations" comprises two essays that look critically at the United Nations's newest efforts generally to eradicate extreme poverty globally, and then looks more narrowly at such efforts in the particular case of France. The common point here is that our current global situations including especially the persistence

of extreme poverty constitutes a general solicitation of reflective persons to reflect freshly on the nature of human beings and persons who continue to suffer such ills, and then to act accordingly.

A second section "Symbolic Discourses" takes up in turn just what substantive empirical differences appear to hold between human beings generally and persons in particular. In the two essays comprising this section the common point is that symbolic linguistic behavior seems clearly to demarcate human beings from persons. What is left open however is whether such a demarcation calls for fresh philosophical and not just further exclusively empirical investigation.

A third and final section "Ethical Limits" also comprises two essays. The first pursues an inquiry into differences between moral and ethical solicitations in what is taken as different kinds of characteristic investigation in philosophical ethics as contrasted with characteristic investigations in moral philosophy. The second essay then looks into the proper limits of ethics itself. The general point in these essays is that effective responses to such global solicitations of extremely impoverished persons today must take more fully into account the reflective limits of both.

The three successive sections conclude with a speculative envoi on the extreme sufferings in Sudan, this time echoing the opening essay about other non-European contexts, namely some Japanese senses of community as responses to moral and ethical solicitations. Here however the emphasis is not on community but on senses of possible "deliverances" from the sufferings of destitution as instances of such responses. In retrospect, Hegel's somewhat obscure but deeply challenging insights into the limits of philosophical reason in the presence of such solicitations provides a sobering conclusion to these essays as a whole.

As each of the essays will demonstrate, my debts are very many. In particular, however, I would single out the continuing support of Hans-Rainer Sepp who has so encouragingly welcomed this book and its companion into his wide ranging book series, *Libri nigri*, and the very strong support of Dean Vit Husek in Olomouc who has repeatedly sought out and found the necessary funding for professional publication. I also would like to thank once again the persistently stimulating philosophical atmosphere of regular meetings with colleagues in Lviv, Ukraine, in Olomouc, the Palacky University, Czech Republic, and in Cracow.

Above all, I am very much indebted in many ways to ongoing sustained conversations with my long standing friends and colleagues, Volodymyr Turchynovskyy from the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv in Ukraine,

Martin Cajthaml from the Palacky University in Olomouc in the Czech Republic, and to Czeslaw Porebski from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow Poland.

My greatest debt, however, is to my spouse and family.

Peter McCormick
Paris 6 January 2019

Endnotes

1   *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols., 6th ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2007) and *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 2000). On the notion of "Standard English" and its two main varieties see *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*, ed. B. Aarts, S. Chalker, and E. Weiner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 386-387.

2   For a more extensive treatment of this special sense see P. McCormick, "Bread and Stones in Paris," in P. McCormick, *Of Three Minds: Essays in Ethics: the Political, the Social, the Global* (Lviv: The Ukrainian Catholic University Press, 2014), pp. 65-100.

Essay I:

Orientations:
Community in the EU and Japan[1]

Introductions

Many would agree that the current constitutional discussions at the European Union, the imminent expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the just as imminent expansion of the European Community have raised fresh questions about just what Europeans think community is and what they think community might mean in the future. Given these European historical, geopolitical, and juridical contexts today, reflections on philosophical aspects of community are timely. And if one's basic interest is retrieving pertinent conceptual resources from European as well as from non-European reflection, then trying to stimulate fresh philosophical articulations of new senses of community for a new Europe is needed.

My purpose here is to offer several reflections on community in contemporary Japan. And the point of these reflections is to assist in a modest way those who are investigating the philosophical bases for the newly emerging understandings of community in Europe today.

Since however I am neither fluent in Japanese nor in any way a specialist in Japanese matters, I must restrict my reflections quite sharply.[2] So I will be discussing here briefly just one small area where the accidents of life have graced me with friendships and with some small knowledge, namely the specialised area of modern Japanese philosophy and its deep roots both in the early medieval period of Japanese history and even in the earliest periods of Japanese explicitly philosophical reflection in the 7th century, C. E. when Buddhism first came to Japan from Korea.[3]

I have however nothing so important as a thesis to present. Instead, my necessarily much less ambitious suggestion will be that understanding at least partly the basic significance of community that is continually at work in Japanese society today depends on recognizing several of the Eastern Buddhist cultural presuppositions of Japanese culture.[4] Recognizing such a connection

throws light on the different kind of solicitations various situations in the world today give rise to.

Consequently, were one to look for and then try to make use of certain conceptual resources for thinking the nature of community from other cultural traditions such as modern Japanese philosophy in view of renewing in a philosophical vein current discussions of newly emerging senses of community in Europe today, one would need to be able to contextualize such conceptual resources inside their major eastern Buddhist cultural presuppositions.

Our discussion might proceed in the following ways. Let me first quite summarily set out a simple contrast between two different philosophical understandings of community in European and Japanese political philosophy respectively. With this contrast on hand, we might next highlight just one of its most salient features. Third, we will then need to sketch the general Buddhist backgrounds of this salient feature of current Japanese philosophical understandings of community, and try to make more precise the distinctively Eastern Buddhist elements of this feature before articulating its unique Japanese features.

Finally, we might start the difficult task of making more explicit certain Shin Buddhist aspects of this unique Japanese conceptual element. That should allow us to conclude reasonably with my suggestion that this conceptual element in medieval Shin Buddhist thought is one of the most important cultural presuppositions of the working understandings of community not just in contemporary Japanese philosophy but even in even in everyday Japan today.

An Elementary Contrast

Many political philosophers in Europe today pursue their various reflections on philosophical problems with a widely shared working understanding of the central notion of "community." There is of course no one standard consensus view of just how the polyvalent expression, "community," and the concept of community (without quotation marks) is to be both parsed and understood in political philosophy today. Nonetheless, many such philosophers would be inclined to agree at least provisionally that community is to be understood in political philosophy today mainly in terms of a philosophical view concerning just where the bases of human rights are to be located.

Thus, communitarianism may be taken as the philosophical view that the bases of rights are to be found not in the individual but in the collective. As such, communitarianism is opposed to political libertarianism that holds

rights to be grounded not in the collective but in the individual. And when regarded historically, contemporary communitarianism in European political philosophy is one of Hegel's recognized children.[5]

Accordingly, the word "community" in this modern European philosophical context does not refer mainly to a group of individuals organized politically or socially, as in the expression "a Protestant enclave in a Catholic community." Rather the main sense of community here is the less familiar one of a quality or state of something shared or held in common, as in the expression "a community of ideas."[6] And what is taken to be shared and held in common are collective rights. Here community means basically what ideas we hold in common.

Now we could look in many places for corresponding uses of the expression, "community," in contemporary Japanese political philosophy. And, since almost all modern Japanese philosophy is very widely conversant with and deeply influenced by (if not entirely polarised) modern European philosophy, we would find very similar views. That is, we would find hardly any differences between contemporary Japanese political philosophers' understandings of "community" in the sense of communitarianism and contemporary European political philosophers' understandings of "community."

For more distinctive non-European notions of community in modern Japanese political philosophy we would have to widen our scope, as Aristotle did. We would have to remember that political philosophy is very closely linked with philosophical ethics. And with that recognition freshly in mind, we might then turn to such ethical works as those of Watsuji Tetsuro.

In his three volume work on philosophical ethics first published in 1937 Watsuji details a specifically modern Japanese version of what Europeans would call today a communitarian ethics rather than a communitarian political philosophy.[7] For Watsuji is not centrally concerned here with articulating the bases for rights in terms of collectives rather than individuals. He is concerned with situating ethical values. And he understands these ethical values to be grounded in a specific sense of community which refers mainly neither to groups of individuals nor to collectives but to the interactions between individuals.

Accordingly, community in this modern Japanese philosophical context does not refer mainly either to any group of individuals organized politically or socially such as a region or a municipality. Nor does community refer here either to anything shared in common like a set of ideas.

Rather the main sense of community refers to the completely unfamiliar notion for most of us in Europe today of something being neither uniquely

individual nor commonly social but subsisting between individuals in some kind of a metaphysical space, in what Japanese thinkers traditionally call "*ma*." That is, community refers here indeed to something shared and held in common as it does in Europe. But what is held in common are not collective rights but, quite obscurely, one's very identity as a person.

Now, without pursuing here the intricate philosophical details of Watsuji's communitarian ethics, I think we can say generally say something like this. For some modern Japanese philosophers community is to be understood ethically in terms of the dynamic, metaphysical interrelations that subsist between individuals.

These relations are constitutive of their persons as simultaneously both individual and social beings. In fact, personhood in Japanese culture generally is neither a property of individuals nor a property of social groups but a property an essentially shared property. This essentially shared reality is what modern Japanese philosophers call "self" (*ningen*).

Suppose we now take at least this one modern European notion of "community" from modern European political philosophy and at least this one modern Japanese notion of "community" from modern Japanese philosophical ethics and examine them briefly. We find of course many similarities and many differences. And each of these features might deserve some further discussion among us today.

But let me try to bring into sharper focus just one of the salient differences only. This difference is what I will call here, perhaps all too audaciously linking together a Japanese expression that originally derives from modern Japanese philosophical readings of Heidegger and an expression from contemporary English-language metaphysics, "the betweenness (*aidagara*) of personhood."[8]

With the help of this compound expression I would now suggest in a preliminary way only that one of the most salient conceptual differences between modern European philosophical understandings of community and modern Japanese philosophical understandings is the difference between construing community as the basic ground of rights and taking community to be the betweenness of personhood.

But to grasp this distinction properly we need now to step back into the historical and philosophical contexts of the peculiar notion I am calling here the betweenness of personhood.

4

Some Buddhist Backgrounds

To understand further we need now some historical and philosophical remarks on just what Buddhism is, on the dispersion of Buddhism initially throughout South, North, and East Asia, on the kinds of East Asian Buddhism, on Japanese Buddhisms in particular, and even more specifically on the two most important kinds of early medieval Pure Land Buddhism. But I don't have space enough to do this here. Instead, let me turn immediately to what it is about some of the teachings of the Shin sect of Pure Land Buddhism that I think might prove helpful for philosophical attempts here to rearticulate fresh senses of community to put at the disposal of new reflection on community in Europe today.[9]

Different kinds of Buddhism understand the nature of community, both its goal and the means for its realisation, in different ways. One distinctive way of understanding the nature of community path is that of Shin Buddhism. We can catch a first glimpse of this distinctive understanding by recalling certain elements in Shin Buddhism.

For the Shin buddhist as for every buddhist, belonging to a community entails making one's way on a spiritual path. Distinctively for the Shin buddhist, one does not need to be a buddhist monk to follow the buddhist path. Rather, one may follow that path as a monk. But one may also follow that path from inside the normal roles, responsibilities, and duties of the ordinary married or unmarried householder.

Moreover, also distinctively for the Shin buddhist, following the path involves a deep awareness of one's own fundamental imperfections, misdeeds, even evil.

Further, following the path involves living out something akin to but certainly different from what Christians call "religious faith." Unlike the Christian believer, however, the Shin Buddhist practicer follows the path not in "faith" but in "*shin.*" And, unlike other Buddhist practicers, the Shin Buddhist practicer follows the path while focussed not on many Buddhas but on a single Buddha, the Amida Buddha.

More important than these distinctive features of Shin Buddhism however are the specific Shin responses to two general issues in Buddhism, to the realization question and to the means question. To the realization question the Shin Buddhist answers that the goal of the path is realization in the sense of an immediate attainment of the mind of Buddha. Unlike other forms of Buddhism, in Shin Buddhism there are no mediate stages to realization as such an attainment.

And to the means question the Shin Buddhist answers that the means to realization as attainment are what is called the uttering of the Name of the Amida Buddha, and that only in the one essential way of reciting the Amida Buddha's name, reciting the name in the form of the "*nembutsu*," the "*Namu-Amida-Butsu*."

But these answers are puzzling for at least several reasons. The Shin Buddhist answer to the realization question plays on an ambiguous distinction between immediate and mediate realization. Realization is said to be without any mediate or intermediate stages as in other forms of Buddhism. Yet at the same time there would seem to be stages in this realization, namely being moved to starting on the path, initially engaging on the path, and coming to the end of the path. But how can realization be properly said to be immediate if realization can only be reached in stages?

And the Shin Buddhist answer to the means question also seems to play on a similarly ambiguous expression. Here the problem is with understanding the one essential way of uttering the Name. At first, one would think that the one essential way is uttering the Name by uttering the *nembutsu*. But then one comes to recognize that some utterings of the *nembutsu* are not essential at all. So if the *nembutsu* is the only esential way of uttering the Name, how can one after all fail to utter the name by just uttering the *nembutsu*?

These initial perplexities are useful ones. For they remind us that we need to pursue a bit farther our attempt to retrieve from one major form of Pure Land Buddhism assembled reminders about just what community in the Pure Land Buddhist backgrounds of modern Japanese philosophical reflection on what I called community as "the betweenness of persons" might mean.

Steps on a Shin Buddhist Path

Fundamental to the Shin Buddhist understanding of the path to realization is the idea of realization not just as an awakening to the way things actually are, but as a spiritual awakening. For not all forms of buddhist awakenings are spiritual in nature. Thus, if I have understood correctly, the way things actually are is the way things are spiritually. When one awakens to a transformed awareness of the way things seem to be, one realizes that the way things are is not the way things seem to be but the way things are spiritually.

But an awakening implies a sleeping. In what senses then are ordinary human beings taken to be ignorant of the way things actually are until they are said, metaphorically, to be awakened from their sleep?

Of course one may be said metaphorically to be asleep in many different senses. Thus someone may be said metaphorically to be asleep in the sense that this person is ignorant and not knowledgeable, or in the sense that this person is evil and not good, or self-centered and not oriented to others. And so on.

But the Shin Buddhist speaks of realization as an awakening in the religious context of Shinran's most fundamental and quite specific diagnosis of the human condition. For the Shin Buddhist the basic problem human beings face is to be understood in the contexts of Shinran's specific teaching about the general doctrine of self-power and other-power. "The focal point of Shinran's concern in his teaching," Dennis Hirota has written recently, "is the obdurate adherence to one's own goodness, even while embracing the Pure Land path of Other Power. This attachment leads to efforts to accomplish good deeds for the sake of achieving salvation, instead of trusting in the working of Amida Buddha."[10]

How then is this problem to be solved? The answer, at least the philosophical answer, I believe, has to be: "mysteriously." Why mysteriously? Because the answer the Shin Buddhist offers seems to resist our usual philosophical attempts to understand problematic matters theoretically. What then is the Shin Buddhist answer?

When one utters the Name properly in reciting the *nembutsu*, one recites the *nembutsu*, DH writes, "not essentially [as] an act of an unenlightened and delusional human being seeking Buddhahood, but rather [as] the act of Amida Buddha [himself]. . . ." (6–7). In other words, the Shin Buddhist practicer recites the *nembutsu* properly when in his or her recitation the Amida Buddha himself utters the Name.

It is true that while reciting the *nembutsu* the Shin Buddhist practicer is understood as still ignorant and remaining caught up in "delusional attachments." But, in reciting the *nembutsu* in the one essential way, the existence of the practicer has already been transformed. What has happened, this view continues, is that the mind that is called the mind of self-power has given way to the mind that is called the mind of other-power. As DH writes in another place, "In Shinran's terms, the collapse of the doubled self [the mind of self-power] is also Amida's giving the Buddha's pure mind to beings as the Name, which surfaces in their existence as the utterance of the *nembutsu*" (194).

What is this transformative surfacing of the Name in the existence of those who have reached realization of attainment on the path? What exactly is transformed, and what exactly is it transformed into?

For Shinran what is transformed is the mind of self-power and calculative thinking. And what this mind is transformed into is the mind of other-power, or the mind of Amida Buddha. And the instantiation of this mind of Amida Buddha takes place in the one essential way of reciting the *nembutsu*.

The realization of attainment takes place according to what Shinran calls "*shinjin*," or "true entrusting." As DH writes, *shinjin* is "itself Amida's wisdom-compassion, so that the Pure Land practicer acquires or realizes the Buddha-mind in the form of *shinjin* or the entrusting of oneself to Amida's vow" (7).

Thus, in reciting the *nembutsu* in the one essential way, the practicer recites the *nembutsu* in the realization of attainment of *shinjin*. Precisley in this respect, the practicer is said to receive both the practice and the mind of Amida Buddha. And the reason is that *shinjin* itself is the practice and the mind of the Amida Buddha.

In the realization of attainment of *shinjin*, ordinary awareness is completely transformed. It is said to be "illuminated" in the light of the Budda mind, and emancipated from its ignorance and deluded actings out of self--attachment. The world is no longer apprehended from the perspective of someone who lives most basically out of an attachment to self, but from the perspective of someone who lives out of a "fulfilled engagement" with the Shin Buddhist path (cf DH, 165).

What has taken place, the Shin Buddhist holds, is that the horizons of one's ordinary thoughtful awareness have lifted. And now one has become aware of the irruption into one's mind and practice of the sovereignty of other-power. One has been brought to see oneself now as no longer thinking and acting in one's own power, but as someone who has been apprehended and grasped by the Amida Buddha himself in one's thinking and acting.

Renewing European Philosophical Reflection on Community Concluding Remarks

Here finally are several reflections showing how these Shin Buddhist teachings help us understand the obscure sense of community in modern Japanese philosophy that I have called "the betweenness of persons."