Between the Global and the Local

Applying the Logic of the
One and the Many to a Global Age

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This essay is part of a larger project in which I explore the contributions that Kyoto school philosophers can make to the construction of a political philosophy for the postmodern and even the post-postmodern age in a globalized world. In particular, I am interested in how Mutai Risaku's vision of a "universal world" (世界的世界) and its "total human being" (全体的人間) can provide a theory of cosmopolitan existence that neither succumbs to communalism nor disintegrates in globalistic universalism.

This may sound ironic, since the two leading philosophers and main representatives of the Kyoto school, Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, have both been accused of nationalist and, by implication, militarist tendencies. However, I believe that the nationalist overtones and subtexts in some of their writings are caused by conceptual inconsistencies and belie the true potential of their philosophies. One of their main disciples, Mutai Risaku, uses concepts central to Nishida and Tanabe's philosophies, and these are "one-and-yet-the-many" (一即多) and the "specific" (種) respectively, to envision a world consisting of a plurality of self-determining political entities. In fact, I believe that Mutai's strong anti-nationalist rhetoric indicates that his conceptual structure can function

as a paradigm that at the same time eschews a faceless universalism and ethnocentric communalism. I will focus here on Mutai's terminology, and in the conclusion will illuminate how his adaptation of the logic of the specific can help in envisioning a global citizen.

Nishida's notion of the nation

Nishida, who was born in 1870 in Kanazawa prefecture, attained national notoriety with his book *Inquiry into the Good* (1911). From then on he taught at the prestigious Imperial University of Kyoto, and came to political philosophy only later in life. After his retirement in 1929, he started to shift the focus of his writings from basic epistemological questions and the attempt to develop a first philosophy to more general reflections about human interaction and history.

These thoughts came to fruition when Nishida was invited to give a talk to a group of generals from the Japanese army in 1938, which was published as *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (日本文化の問題; NKZ 14: 387–418). Other examples of Nishida's attempts at a practical application of his political philosophy can be found in his 1940 version of *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (NKZ 12: 274–384), and his *The Principles of the New World Order* (世界新秩序の原理) (426–34). In these essays, which are rather ambiguous to say the least, he suggested that Japan and, specifically, the Japanese emperor, constituted the center of the world. As early as 1934 Nishida had already pronounced a less provocative version of the sentiment that Japan constitutes the highest culture in *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* (哲学の根本問題). This was not unlike Hegel's claim for the superiority of Prussia. Nishida's argument for these obviously nationalistic positions is that Japan exhibits the most developed dialectical structure of "absolute contradictory self-identity" (絶対矛盾的自己同一) and thus expresses the "dialectical universal" (弁証法的一般者), the oneness of the world, that is, the "one" (一), and the "absolute" (絶対). Nishida notes, in a similar vein, that as one of the many, the emperor embodies the oneness of the world.

Nishida introduced his concept of the "one-and-yet-the-many" and the "many-and-yet-the-one" in his essay *Acting Intuition* (行為的直観)

in 1938, and brought it to fruition in his *Collection of Philosophical Essays Vol.4* (哲学論文集第四) in 1944. He believed that only the conceptual pair of the "one-and-yet-the-many" and the "many-and-yet-the-one" could sufficiently describe the relationship between the "historical world" (歴史的世界), which he conceived of as the "absolute," and the multiplicity of the "acting individuals" that make up this world.[1]

In *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*, Nishida probes the feasibility of the Aristotelian "subject that cannot become a predicate," the Platonic "form," paraphrased by Nishida as the "predicate that cannot become a subject," and the quasi-Hegelian "dialectical universal." He concludes that the former two concepts are not only exclusive but also ignore the multiplicity of the world insofar as they mainly highlight the relationship between one particular and one universal. While the latter concept sufficiently articulates the dialectical relationship of what could be called the fourfold principles of determination—the self-determination of the universal, the determination of the universal by the individual, the self-determination of the individual, and the determination of the universal by the individual—it nevertheless implies a primacy of the universal over the particular and of the particularity of the "acting individual" over the multiplicity thereof. It is only the conception of the historical world as the "one-and-yet-the-many" and the "many-and-yet-the-one" that sufficiently resolves the philosophical dilemma of essentialism.

Nishida sees this concept most poignantly expressed in the alternative between Spinoza's monism and Leibniz's monadology, and believes it describes the structure of the "acting individual" most appropriately. This "acting individual" is located at the intersection of the vertical axis connecting the universal and the particulars as well as in a net, not unlike Indra's net, of connections among infinite particulars on the horizontal dimension. In other words, as Kasulis has suggested, it constitutes a "holographic entrypoint" (2002) to the "historical world" (歴史的世界).

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1. While Nishida does not actually use the term "acting individual," he often uses the term "acting self" (行為的自己) in his *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*, and observes more than once that "individuals determine each other in their expressions and activities" (NKZ 7: 59).

Using this framework, Nishida suggests that Japan in general and the emperor in particular constitute an "acting individual" which perfectly "expresses" (表現) the historical world as well as the individuality of all other nations and people respectively. In addition, Nishida continues, Japan constitutes a "self-identity of the absolute contradictories of East and West" and a "dialectical culture" that sublates the opposition of the archaic *Gemeinschaft* and the metropolitan *Gesellschaft*. Nishida uses the term "culture of nothingness" (無の文化), but defines "nothingness" (actually "true non-being" 真の無) as "being-*qua*-non-being" (有即無), that is, as that which dialectically sublates "being" and "non-being." For this reason I use the term "dialectical culture." This form of culture, Nishida contends, is most clearly manifested in the Japan of the early Shōwa period:

> Within the Japanese spirit, which moves towards the truth of things at the bottom of the subject by transcending the subject, the spirit of Eastern culture is always and everywhere brought to life. At the same time, it is always something that is directly united with the spirit of Western culture, which emerges from its environment. (NKZ 12: 360)

Subsequently, for Nishida, Japan occupies a central place in history. The former argument that Japan constitutes an "acting individual" is, for the most part, consistent with his basic philosophical insight; the problem with this line of argument, however, is that Nishida's dialectic of the one and the many equally applies to all other nations or peoples without privileging any of them, including Japan and its emperor. He argued for the superiority of Japan on the grounds that it constitutes a "self-identity of the absolute contradictories of East and West." This rhetoric could be (and has been) used in an appropriately altered form by a host of other political entities (such as in India and Hong Kong); it also absolutizes the rather spurious dichotomy between East and West and essentializes the notion of nation states and national or geographical entities. Most of all, however, his arguments in support of nationalist beliefs belie the subversive potential of his non-dualist philosophy, which, if taken seriously, subverts rather than reifies conceptual tokens such as the nation state and the orientalist bifurcation of the world.

Tanabe's concept of nation

The case of Nishida's successor at Kyoto University, Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), seems, ironically enough, strikingly similar. Tanabe first attained a reputation for his extraordinary work in the field of the philosophy of science and for his commentaries on Kant. His first original work, *The Logic of the Specific* (種の論理), not only established his reputation as a creative thinker but also delineated his position from that of his mentor. While not necessarily representative of his later work, his "logic of the specific" constitutes his major contribution to the philosophy of the Kyoto School and forms the philosophical basis for what can be called the nationalist tendencies in his work.

Tanabe felt that Nishida's philosophy of history was too abstract and not really grounded in history itself. The reasons for this shortcoming was, in Tanabe's eyes, Nishida's obsession with concepts such as the universal and the particular, which strictly speaking constitute elusive, limit functions, and are not rooted in concrete objects and events. Moreover, Tanabe argued, the rhetoric of the one and the many implies a false alternative between an absolutism, whereby the individual is subsumed under and within the absolute, and an "irrational ideology" (非合理主義) in the case of a "unity" (統一) or "identity" (同一) of the one and the many. Therefore, Tanabe suggested shifting the focus of philosophy from the empty concepts that signify abstract and elusive extremes to one that mediates them concretely in history.

As the basic concept of his philosophy of "absolute mediation" (絶対媒介)—a notion derived from Hegelian dialectics—Tanabe identifies the "specific" (種). He argues that any philosophy of history requires a mediation of the "totality" (全体) and the "individual" (個体), as well as the encounter among individuals such as the "I" (我) and the "thou" (汝). The third term that enables this kind of "mediation" and decentralizes each of the extremes as well as de-essentializes history is "society" (社会). Tanabe's conceptual adjustment of Nishida's philosophy results in a shift away from Nishida's obsession with dichotomies and binaries, even the dichotomy of the one and the many, and breathes life into the abstract "many" by adding the anonymous and egalitarian "he" (彼, but unfortunately not a "she") to the "I" and "thou"; society is thus not

restricted to interpersonal encounters, and history is not restricted to the conflict between two nations. It is the "specific" that mediates the "general" (普遍) and the "individual" (個体) as the "particular" (特殊). History is not constituted by abstracts such as empty universals or infinitely small particulars, but by specific cultures, traditions, and religions. The "logic" that describes the social dimension of history must be a "logic of the specific."

At this point a brief explanation of my translation of *shu* is in order. James Heisig suggests rendering this term, which is usually translated as "species," as the "specific." The traditional word choice certainly has validity since not only does the general use of *shu* suggest "species," Tanabe himself contrasts it with the term *rui* (類), "genus." Nevertheless, I follow Heisig's lead here since Tanabe and Mutai both explicitly identify *shu* as the "particular" expression of the totality and contrast it with the terms "individual" and "general."

This short exploration already illustrates that Tanabe designed his "logic of the specific" to cure Nishida's philosophy of its absolutism and its lack of foundation in the concrete historical world. He replaced the term "absolute" (絶対), which constituted the central feature of most of Nishida's later philosophy, with the term "specific" and illustrated the "specific" by what he perceived to be the historical and social reality of the "national entity" (国家). The "specific" was designed to be the corrective feature of limit function such as "totality" and "individual," thereby preventing the equally unacceptable political ideologies of absolutism and anarchy. However, as a by-product, he ended up absolutizing the specific and, by default, the notion of the "national entity." Tanabe's philosophy of "absolute mediation" therefore resulted, at least temporarily, in nationalism and not in the "metanoetics" (懺悔道) of "absolute criticism" (絶対批判) as it did in his later work.

His later notion of the "absolute critique" manages not only to criticize the absolutism of foundational concepts, it also functions as a self-corrective, or some would say "deconstructive" principle, not unlike Derrida's *différance* or the Mahāyāna concept of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) that escape any attempt of reification and absolutization, thus subverting any form of hegemonic thinking. This is where the irony of Tanabe's philosophy of "absolute mediation" lies: as successful as he was in iden-

tifying the flaws in Nishida's system and pointing out the necessity of a mediating principle to prevent Nishida's dialectics of the one and the many from robbing history of its concreteness and its vitality, he succumbed to a similar mistake by reifying and privileging (if not absolutizing) the "specific." Not only that, his identification of the "specific" with the "national entity" of Japan committed the fallacy of essentialism and ignored the plurality of specifics.

What is nationalism?

Before I proceed to discuss Mutai's approach, I would like to reiterate what lies at the basis of the two forms of nationalism discussed. Nishida identifies the Japanese state as the one that transcends all citizens of Japan as well as one of the many nations that surpasses them as *primus inter pares.* The reason for this is that Japan constitutes, in Nishida's opinion, the only particular that fully expresses the absolute. Tanabe reifies the nation state as the "specific" and privileges this "specific" over the oneness of the world, the multiplicity of individuals, and over other nation states. A comparison between Tanabe and Nishida's nationalism discloses a feature of nationalism that should not surprise: nationalism implies the reification of an abstract concept, an "imagined community" to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, as well as the absolutization of one specific *primus inter pares.*

What is ironic about the nationalisms of Nishida and Tanabe is not the structural features they use themselves, but the fact that they justified these nationalisms with a philosophy that was, on the contrary, subversive, egalitarian, and anti-essentialist. If the historical world is conceived of as "one-and-yet-the-many," it is not only impossible to privilege one nation above the others but also to assign primacy to a community of nations over the individual nations themselves. It does not escape a certain irony that despite its use in the history of China and Korea, as well as by Nishida, the principle of the "one-and-yet-the-many" is, philosophically speaking, thoroughly egalitarian. Similarly, if the nation as the "specific" mediates the one and the many, not only does the "specific" reflect and express the multiplicity of individuals as well as the oneness

of the historical world, but there must be a multiplicity of specifics, lest it morph into a "one" itself, reifying and absolutizing that "one." This is ironic because to avoid such an absolutization of the "one," Tanabe articulated the "logic of the specific" in the first place. In other words, the notion of the specific is designed to subvert the hegemony of either the one or the many and, subsequently, to reject absolutism as well as anarchy as the ideal political systems. So what is needed is a re-conceptualization of these ideas to explore their application to political philosophy and their critical potential in subverting nationalism. It was Mutai Risaku who realized the true potential of Nishida's "one-and-yet-the-many" and Tanabe's "specific" and proceeded to ground his humanism in these very concepts.

Mutai's humanism

Mutai Risaku (1890–1974), one of Nishida's closest students, is frequently associated with the so-called "left wing" of the Kyoto school. He made a name for himself as a philosopher when he developed his own brand of humanism, which he called "global humanism," or more literally, "humanism for humanity" (人類ヒューマニズム), after the end of World War II. He contrasts this form of humanism with the aristocratic humanism of the Renaissance as well as the metropolitan humanism of the bourgeoisie and identifies it as socialist humanism. Mutai suggests that theories of humanism usually project Eurocentric trajectories of intellectual development that overlook forms of humanism that developed in different parts of the world. He cites as examples "the aristocratic humanism of ancient Japan as expressed in the *Manyōshū*, the martial humanism of the Kamakura period as expressed in war records, and the humanism characteristic of merchants and townspeople during the Tokugawa period" (MRZ 6: 221). Of course, one could add, among others, the Confucian classics such as the *Analects*, the *Mengzi*, and the *Xunzi*, as well as early Buddhist writings. The implication here, though Mutai never spells it out himself, is that to really serve humanity, humanism has to acknowledge sources from more than one intellectual tradition.

Mutai grounds his humanism in the insight that human beings have simultaneous yet conflicting desires for freedom and peace. He roots this philosophy in the experience of World War II, especially in the resistance of the White Rose to the Third Reich. While Mutai avoids commenting on Japanese militarism throughout the first half of the twentieth century—for example, he talks about the destruction brought by the detonation of the two nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki but forgets to mention the Nanjing massacre or the fate of the comfort women—his attempt to ground his humanism in the experience of a movement that resisted a nationalist dictatorship signals a significant shift away from any association with the nationalist ideology or the military that Nishida and Tanabe may or may not have had. Mutai explicitly takes the side of a group of students who not only disassociated themselves from the nationalist ideology of a fascist dictatorship but actively opposed it. This disillusionment with universalist theories and his commitment to reassign importance and power to the individual is indicative of, and reflected in Mutai's humanism.

To be able to serve the needs of the contemporary period, Mutai argues, humanism has to recognize the central paradox at the core of human existence, which has traditionally been overlooked. He arrives at this paradox by taking as his starting point a postulate that seems innocuous enough to apply to any form of humanism: the goal of humanism is to "affirm the life, value, and creativity of humans in their totality" (MRZ 6: 189). In other words, central to any conception of humanism is the demand for happiness (幸福), which is threatened by war, natural disasters, poverty, sickness, and alienation. To alleviate war, Mutai suggests it is necessary to assume the standpoint of "all of humanity" (全人類). At the same time, it is pivotal to guarantee the self-determination of all nations, the violation of which is, to Mutai, the "basic evil of war" (MRZ 9: 216). Mutai explains "to abolish wars, the number one priority must be to embrace as a rule that it is indispensable to protect world peace and the independence of nations" (217).

Mutai does not stop at international or global politics, but also moves individuals into the framework of a "global humanism." He believes that to solve the "evils of nationalism" and social evils such as poverty it is essential to recognize the need for freedom and happiness as well as the

rights and responsibilities of all individuals. Finally, to prevent the suffering that is brought about by natural disasters, human beings have to acknowledge that humanity and nature coexist in a "mutual relationship" and have to live accordingly. In short, Mutai observes that in order to alleviate suffering and to provide happiness to all of humanity, a global humanism must embrace the demands of nature, all individual nations, and all individuals alike. This means that he balances the demand of national self-determination with the rights of individuals, and suggests that peace involves not only every member of the human community but extends to all of nature as well. To develop such a philosophy is, of course, a tall order. But Mutai believes that the conceptual foundation of such a humanism is provided by the philosophies of Nishida and Tanabe.

To develop a humanism that fulfills all the above-mentioned criteria, Mutai established three basic terms: the totality of life, the individual, and a notion of culture that mediates the former two and thus evokes the dialectical philosophy of the main Kyoto school philosophers. Like Nishida, Mutai believes that any political philosophy has to start with the limit functions of the "one" and the "many"; in Mutai's terminology, these are the "individual" (個体) and the "world" (世界); from Tanabe, he borrows the concepts of the "specific," which he identifies as "society" (社会), and that of "mediation." With these building blocks provided by his teachers, Mutai develops a sophisticated philosophical model of history.

History, Mutai maintains, evolves through a tension between the oneness of the cosmos and the individual defined as "acting subject" (行為的主体). He calls this cosmic oneness, which he conceives of in spatial and temporal terms, the "world." However, since this "world" includes everything, it takes on the form of "nothingness," in Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's sense of "not a single thing." At the same time, the individual is infinitely small and disappears, as Jean-Paul Sartre has noted, in the infinitely small rupture between two moments on the time line. Thus, Mutai concludes that while the "individual" and the "world" constitute the basic framework of the "historical world," they are not concrete and thus need to be mediated by a third term, the "specific." Like Tanabe, in Mutai's philosophy, the "specific," that is, the "particular" (特殊) expres-

sion of the world, and the individual functions as the social and cultural structure that mediates between the world and the individual. The principle of "mediation" is necessary to prevent the notions of "world" and "individual" from being reified and reduced to abstract and static entities. In other words, the concept of "mediation" functions as the principle of dynamicity and transformation. However, and this marks a crucial difference between Mutai and Tanabe, Mutai's "specific" is neither singular nor central; on the contrary, Mutai introduces the notion of what could be called a triangular mediation that does not privilege any of the three terms, but rather presumes an egalitarian relationship among them. Politically, this means that Mutai equally eschews any form of totalitarianism—be it absolutism, nationalism, or anarchy—and implies a radical multilateralism not only among equals, such as individuals or societies, but also among the three terms insofar as he refuses to privilege any one of them.

To stratify Mutai's multilateralism, I would like to briefly examine Mutai's conceptions of the "world," "society," and "individual." The key term here is "world." The "world," Mutai explains, "constitutes the totality but is not complete" (MRZ 4: 92). This point is of absolute importance to Mutai's system. Mutai postulates a unified system, the "world," which contains a spatio-temporal reality and comprises the "actual world" (現実的世界). At the same time, he asserts the openness of this system, that is, not only the possibility of but the very necessity for change. The absolute is never completed; rather its completion is, to appropriate a term coined by Jacques Derrida, "infinitely deferred."

It is for this reason that Nishida's most accomplished critic, Takahashi Satomi, claimed that there is no totality but at the end of history. While this is correct, logically speaking Mutai's conception is not only more courageous but, above all, constitutes the only way to conceive of a constantly transforming universe that does not disintegrate but displays some cohesiveness and unity. To articulate the paradox that the absolute is not absolute since it is in constant flux, Mutai uses Nishida's terminology of "absolute nothingness" (絶対無) to refer to the "world." This means that the "world" is devoid of essences, it is dynamic, and it forms the actual world in that it "transcends itself inside itself" (115). It is formed and,

to use one of Nishida's favorite terms, "determined" (限定された) by the "acting individual."

> When it works as an "acting individual," the individual not only negates the standpoint of expression in that it transcends the universal world of expression, but also constitutes the point in which the world expresses itself in its depth. (72)

What Mutai states here using the language of the Kyoto School is that the subjective activity of the individual—"individual" not being defined as a person over time but rather as a creative moment—radically ruptures and, at the same time, creatively transforms, the "world." Given these descriptions, I think it is best to understand the "world" as a "principle of unity" insofar as it implies that the multiplicity of individuals all inhabit the same world, while "individual" designates an infinite amount of subjectivities that create and transform the world we live in.

As a place where the world and the individual oppose each other as opposites, Mutai identifies a "society in the form of the specific" (種的社会) (MRZ 4: 68). As such it discloses as its structure an "identity of contradictories" (矛盾的同一). It constitutes a concrete and particular expression of the world which is simultaneously universal and abstract. It is only in the specific that we can encounter the world. Admittedly, the term "specific" is not only indistinct. Even Mutai himself is rather hesitant to give concrete examples other than "society" and "culture." His more concrete description of the "specific" characterizes it as "the formative activity of cultural types" (95).

Here I would venture my own illustration of this central concept. In the same way in which I described Mutai's world as a principle of unity, and his "individual" as a concept denoting subjective agency and experience, I believe his "specific" is best described as concrete expression and material culture. It subsumes, among others, what we call personhood, ethnicity, religion, subculture, and nation. It constitutes the product of human activity. In other words, the individual transforms the world by producing concrete realities.

To articulate the paradoxical predicament that the specific simultaneously particularizes the world and generalizes the individual, Mutai refers to the structure of the specific as that which is "particular-and-yet-

general" (特殊即普遍). However, while the specific is always created by a multiplicity of individuals, it can at best constitute a world but not the "world," that is, a relative generality but not the totality of the cosmos. And this is where, according to Mutai, the fallacy of nationalism lies: it commits the fallacy of absolutizing one particular. Not only does the "specific" constitute but a relative generality or collective, as there are an infinity of "individual" subjectivities, which, being formed by the world, transform the world, there must be an equally infinite number of specifics, which express the world. Such a conception renders nationalism, of course, indefensible.

Conclusion

So how does Mutai's appropriation of Nishida and Tanabe's philosophy render the notion of the global citizen? This is a complex question, not least of all because Mutai was writing some twenty years before the term "globalism" would gain currency. However, I think it is rather obvious how Mutai's philosophy can make a contribution to this discourse. First, his concept of "world" provides a moment of unity and openness at the same time, thus barring any possibility that someone might postulate the essence of the world or at least its truth. This is important since throughout history such essentializations of the world have been used to justify hegemonic discourses.

Second, his notion of the individual as creative subjectivity decentralizes his conception of the "universal world" and, at the same time, emphasizes personal responsibility. Like the rejection of a world essence, his repeated emphasis that the "one world" possesses an infinite amount of centers bodes well for movements of multiculturalism and multilateralism. Yet, his focus on the responsibility the individual has towards the total whole, including its open-endedness, is a strong indication that Mutai values social justice. This sentiment is supported by his defense of liberation movements against oppressive regimes.

Finally, Mutai's conception of the specific, which for him, contrary to Tanabe, is exemplified in "traditions" and "societies" but not in "nations," not only thwarts any attempt of nationalism or any other

form of chauvinism, but also allows for theories of multiple belonging and cosmopolitanism and global citizenship as have been suggested, for example, by Anthony Appiah, Gerd Baumann, Iris Marion Young, and Julia Kristeva. I think it is these features that make Mutai's humanism a strong candidate for any theory of the global citizen.

References

Abbreviations

MRZ 『務台理作著作集』[Collected writings of Mutai Risaku]. 9 vols. (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, 2000–2002).

NKZ 『西田幾多郎全集』[Collected works of Nishida Kitarō]. 20 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988).

THZ 『田辺元全集』[Collected works of Tanabe Hajime]. 15 vols. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1963–1964).

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