

# Arendt and Maruyama

## Complementary Approaches to Totalitarianism

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In presenting the views of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) and Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男 (1914–1996) on fascism and totalitarianism, I will not be speaking as a specialist in Japanese thought, nor even as a professional philosopher. My voice is rather that of an ordinary intellectual living in the early years of the twenty-first century when we seem to have reentered those “dark times” of which Arendt spoke. As new forms of fascism take shape even here in Europe, there is reason to believe that totalitarian methods and solutions could fall upon us unexpectedly at any time. As intellectuals we must not only be alert to this possibility but must work to protect the spirit of civilization against it. We need to safeguard humanism against the destruction of the human that totalitarian systems bring. I suggest that Arendt and Maruyama can serve us as guides in that effort.

Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism is well known. One aspect of its relevance for us is the way she managed to combine into a single

typology two ideologically antithetic political regimes, namely, Hitlerism and Stalinism. I would like to complement her analysis with a number of remarks from Maruyama Masao concerning the Japanese version of the totalitarian phenomenon, the “*tennō*-centrism”<sup>1</sup> that flourished during the ultranationalistic and militaristic regimes of the 1930s and 1940s. No author today can seriously deny the fascist character of this regime;<sup>2</sup> the reality of its totalitarian proportions emerges clearly from a comparison of Arendt’s and Maruyama’s analyses.<sup>3</sup> The

1. *Tennō* 天皇 is the Japanese term for the emperor.

2. The fascist nature of imperial Japan in the 1930s and 1940s is obvious from the ideology it openly claimed. Maruyama notes that all fascist movements share

the rejection of the world view of individualistic liberalism, opposition to parliamentary politics which is the political expression of liberalism, insistence on foreign expansion, a tendency to glorify military build-up and war, a strong emphasis on racial myths and the national essence, a rejection of class warfare... and the struggle against Marxism. (MARUYAMA 1969, 35)

Fascist regimes reject both capitalism and socialism because both appear to be a form of materialism that rejects all spiritual motivation. In practice, as we know, all fascist states eventually ally themselves with the capitalistic plutocracy. In the case of Hitler, this meant support for Bolshevism in order combat the common enemy of democracy.

Japanese fascism shows a number of distinctive traits. Foremost is the insistence on family structure, which was extended to the nation as a whole so that it could be seen as a single extended family united around the imperial family. This insistence not only confirmed the fusion of the private and the public, it reinforced the conviction of belonging to a same blood, equated loyalty to societal leaders with filial piety, and facilitated the amalgamation of rural populations, still numerous at the time, in which the family cell was essential. These rural communities, heirs to a long tradition of peasant uprisings, were worried that industrial and urban development that did not favor them. The fascist movement in Japan cleverly managed to seduce the provinces with traditionalistic agrarian clichés like the glorification of the family, and a host of promises—all of them to be broken—having to do with the decentralization of government and a greater autonomy for rural communities. Agrarianism is probably the main difference between Japan’s ultranationalism and German Nazism, which was more preoccupied with restoring the working class. Furthermore, unlike Hitlerism, which Japanese fascism brought into closer alignment with Stalinism, we have Japan’s explicit ambitions to liberate Asia from Western imperialism. This was to take place through the creation of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (*Daitōa kyōeiken* 大東亜共榮圈), which we now know was no more than a pretext for Japanese imperialism.

3. It is not always easy to distinguish fascism from totalitarianism. In general, we may say that fascism remains within the constitutional system established by rule of law, except that the entire party system has been usurped by a single party, which progressively imposes an authoritarian regime and suppresses all political opposition. A totalitarian

interest of joining the attribute “totalitarian” to the description of Japanese fascism doesn’t lie in the formulation of a new grievance against a regime that has been universally condemned for decades, but rather in giving a new proof of the eminently “modern” character of the Japan of the 20th century—taking into account here the fact that totalitarianism, as Arendt has shown, is a product of modernity (and, to some extent, a reaction against it, which confirms its dependence on it). Now it seems to me that Japanese modernity, which some people still contest, forces us to take into account the Japanese cultural phenomenon within all discussion concerning modernity and its critique—considering also the fact that, if Japan is modern to the same extent as the West, it is so according to its own proper cultural heritage, the acknowledgment of which should be able to enrich the present day discussions on modernity in Europe and it would enable us to overcome the extremely iterative character of the arguments that we keep hearing within them.

## I

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt proposed to begin with a joint examination of Bolchevism and Nazism as a basis for a factual typology of totalitarianism. At first sight, one may regret that her analysis was not enriched with details from Japanese ultranationalism. The defect works to our advantage once we see how it enables us better to identify the remarkable relevance of the Arendt’s typology, once we discover that the scheme she has elaborated by focusing on Stalinism and Hitlerism also applies to the militaristic *ten-*

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system goes a step further in order to keep radicalizing itself: governance is executed through secret police rather than through the open, official channels. In this way it aims at a gradual dismantling of the rule of law and is animated by the will to global domination both abroad (through wars of expansion) and within the country (through a reign of terror and the gradual robotization and dehumanization of the general population). The creation of concentration camps, where these goals are experimented with before being applied to the whole population, is the clearest sign that a regime has turned totalitarian.

*nō*-centric system. As we shall see, this is particularly true for the comparison of German National Socialism with Japanese ultranationalism.

Ultrationalistic Japan did not turn fiercely and unrelentingly against any particular nation or ethnic group—certainly not the Jewish people, as the Nazis did. What it did manage to do, however, was to create a cohesion among its own people through a mixture of nationalism and xenophobia. Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 led it to treat its own Korean population as second-class citizens whose own identity was actively suppressed. This in itself suggests some similarity to the treatment of the Jews in Germany, thought obviously much more temperate and with no genocidal intent.<sup>4</sup> In any case, the question is too serious and far-reaching to treat here. What is clear is that by exalting the nation with its ideology of ethnic identity, the Shintō mythology of the divine origin of the Japanese race stands shoulder to shoulder with the Nazi mythology of a superior Aryan race. Both relied heavily on a xenophobia fueled by every means at the disposal of the ruling powers. On this score, the account of the genealogy of European antisemitism in the first volume of Arendt's *Origins* sheds light on the study of Japanese nationalism. But it is especially with her analysis of imperialism in the second volume that the typological and structural analogies prove most illuminating.

Beginning in the Meiji era (1868–1912), the Japanese nation modeled its construction on a heterogeneous Western model. It conjoined the economic nationalism and enlightened despotism of Bismarckian Prussia to the imperialistic colonialism of the Atlantic capitalistic powers, Britain and France. During the first half of the Shōwa era, from 1926 to 1945, imperial Japan was less preoccupied with the democratic pretext and legislative framework of the countries it sought to emulate. Its commitment to militaristic expansion merged the colonial logic of

4. This historic situation might be better compared to the attitude of Britain towards Ireland during the long centuries of British occupation preceding Irish independence in 1916.

advanced industrialized nations (France, Britain, Holland, and Belgium) with the annexational logic of the continental European powers (the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian empires).<sup>5</sup> It showed no scruples when it came to applying the same principles: unlimited economic growth became the stimulus to and final end of expansion; colonial administration created a bureaucracy whose principles of governance were based not in law but in decree or statutory order, and whose executive action included state-sponsored violence; social cohesion at home was cemented by diverting class consciousness and conflicts of a national scale into the cultivation of ethnic consciousness bound to the Empire, with the result that tribal unity among members of the dominant nation, viewed as more civilized or even ethnically superior, was pitted against dominated nations viewed as backwards or inferior.

These phenomena, which Arendt analyzes in the context of the European imperialistic powers at the end of the nineteenth century, are all to be found in Japanese imperialism at the beginning of the twentieth. Both helped, in comparable ways, to pave the way to the First World War, a war between rival imperialistic powers if ever there was one. Both helped, too, lay the groundwork for fascist ideology and its totalitarian institutionalization by highlighting the hypocrisy of capitalistic democracies, which are at the same time inegalitarian and imperialistic exploiters, by fueling contempt for human rights and discrediting democratic ideals, and by exposing colonial bureaucracy as a contradiction to the principles underlying the rule of law—ironically prefiguring the very totalitarian conduct they were to usher in. Finally, in Europe as in Japan, the ascent of Soviet power during the 1920s came to be felt more and more as a threat against which fascism presented itself as the strongest possible defense.

Totalitarian systems were established differently in Russia, Ger-

5. Arendt fails to include Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, which belong to an earlier age of European expansionism. Both were in decline during the nineteenth century when industrial imperialism (mainly British and French) was on the rise.

many, and Japan, the first by violent revolution (1917), the second by free elections (1933), and the last by a progressive militarization of the regime that began slowly in 1912 and picked up the pace after 1936.<sup>6</sup> Once established, however, they functioned and intensified according to the same logic: the massification and automatization of social classes, the suppression of rights and liberties, the establishment of a police state, and the introduction of a reign of terror aimed at total domination of the populace. In each case ideological fictions were introduced to fill the vacuum of meaning created by the rigidity of the new social order and the destruction of the old. Monolithic mass movements replace multi-party systems. The international *consensus juris* is discarded for militarized regimes with a foreign policy aiming ever more openly for world domination. At home, concentration camps spread fear among the general public, even as the powers that be pursued their ends with ever greater suicidal fever and hastened the way to their own collapse.

Throughout it all, the ruling ideological fiction was crucial in channeling and sublimating the frustration of the masses, endemic in

6. Maruyama distinguishes three phases in the development of the Japanese fascist movement. (1) The “preparatory period” extended from about 1919 just after WWI until the Manchurian incident of 1931, when, after a number of failed military *coups d’état* (notably against Prime-Minister Hamaguchi), the army decided to invade Manchuria and establish a puppet-state (Manchūkuo 満州国). The civil government, forced to recognize in retrospect what had happened, lost what authority it still had to the military. Meantime, a number of civilian right-wing movements were taking shape and paving the way to the civil acceptance of a militaristic regime. (2) In the second stage, or “period of maturity,” the military openly presented itself as the driving force of the fascist movement, rallying most of the civilian right wing organizations. This period was marked by a series of failed military coups which only served to entrench a permanent state of terror, most notably the failed coup of 1936 known as the February 26 Incident of 1936, which shook the entire nation. (3) The third stage or the “consummation period” began with a purge of the army in which rebelling perpetrators were only mildly condemned by the civil power and lasted until the Pacific war, under General Tōjō’s dictatorship, came to an end on 15 August 1945. During this period, Maruyama states, “the military, now the open supporters of fascism from above, fashioned an unstable ruling structure in coalition with the semi-feudal power of the bureaucracy and the Senior Retainers on the one hand, and with monopoly capital and the political parties on the other” (MARUYAMA 1969, 27).

capitalistic society, but also in rallying the intelligentsia to the surprising phenomena of what Arendt terms “the temporary alliance between the mob and the elite.”<sup>7</sup> To be sure, the frustration of the masses stems from a loss of meaning whose origins are complex but linked, in any event, to social upheavals associated with the hasty adaptation of industrial capitalism (what Heidegger, in simpler terms, referred to as the “age of technology”). Among other things, we see the sudden uprooting of rural populations from traditional cottage-industry production with its reliance on individual craft and its setting in communities organized according to class, corporations, or guilds. These workers suddenly found themselves transplanted in the production line of industrialized exploitation with no chance to band together for common interests. This social automatization with its loss of social anchoring forced workers into social isolation or, at best, refuge in the family cell.

The complementary phenomena of massification and automatization signaled the disappearance of the very web of human relations that constitute public space. Not surprisingly, it went hand in hand with the disappearance of traditional popular culture even as an “*avant-garde*” urban culture stepped in to alienate more and more of the bourgeois public from their past and repackage their own nostalgia for sale and consumption. Uprooted rural people and bourgeois circles both suffer from a lack of meaning, even an existential vacuum. Expectations of change, vague but powerful, rush in to fill the void, only to make them ever more vulnerable to the ideological fictions of totalitarian discourse.

As for the intellectual elite of the time, in Europe as in Japan they were driven, as the dethroned aristocracy had been, by a strong contempt for the bourgeois liberalism undergirding the capitalistic system that had led to the social conflicts that sparked the Russian revolution as much as it had led to the imperialistic rivalries that lay behind the

7. ARENDT 1973, 326.

First World War. Behind a facade of liberal respectability, the capitalistic bourgeoisie was behaving around the world like a gang of thieves, motivated only by the lure of financial gain. Liberalism's loss of credit in the eyes of the intelligentsia explains to some extent the support many of them gave to fascist discourse, which at least had the honesty to raise an audible voice against the hypocritical logic of imperialistic capitalism and its competitive rush for global domination.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the actual content of the ideological fictions at work in particular totalitarian movements, we note considerable differences: in Russia, a systematization of Marxist philosophy of history, with a local adaptation to a Panslavonic messianism; in Germany, a Nietzschean-style type vulgarization of Darwinian evolutionary theory; and in Japan, a simplification, politicization, and militarization of Shintō beliefs. Whatever their differences, the ideological fictions play fundamentally the same role, namely, to intoxicate the masses and legitimize power by means of unassailable "laws," which—be they historical, natural, or divine—are in essence "superior" to human laws and superior to the *consensus juris* in effect between nations insofar as it affect individuals within a given state.

The German situation, during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933), is quite comparable to that of Japan during the Taishō era (1912–1926), when Marxists and conservative nationalists, though ideological opposites, put their differences aside in view of the disintegration of a rule of law that was nevertheless less pronounced in the archipelago than it was in Germany. During the first part of the Shōwa era when militarization of the regime became solidified and was taking an ever more nationalistic and totalitarian turn, intellectuals on the left were being forc-

8. Arendt's treatment of intellectuals is somewhat unclear, but she does mention writers such as Ernst Jünger, Nietzsche, Malraux, Bakounine and a few others (1973, 328ff). Maruyama mentions no names and seems to suggest that proper academic intellectuals, including university students, were rather skeptical of the imperial ideology and that enthusiasm was only to be found among what he calls the "pseudo-intellectuals" (among which were school teachers, petty journalists, Shintō priests, and small factory owners) (1969, 57ff).



ible silenced while conservative intellectuals wavered between keeping silent (the strategy of the more moderate among them) or openly supporting the regime (that of the more opportunistic). As a result, there was little open resistance in Japan except for the rare committed Christian or Buddhist, or the handful of Marxists who held their own and did not change sides. The question we are left with concerns what it was in the Japanese situation that prompted the conversion of such a significant number of intellectuals to the ideology of the day.

## II

It is here that Maruyama Masao's contribution shows itself to be most valuable in his endeavor to clarify two main questions: How could fascism develop on the political foundations laid by Meiji Japan? And how could Japanese intellectuals shaped for decades by the Western rationalism have fallen prey so easily to the irrational mythology of the imperial way? I base myself here on a collection of his essays, now a modern classic, translated into English as *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*.<sup>9</sup>

Keeping his distance from the Marxism of a number of his colleagues during the 1950s and 1960s, Maruyama sought to explain not only the conscious ideology of Japan's ultranationalism but also the often unconscious values and prejudices that underlay it. The question for him was to show that the fascist period was not, as often presented, a simple deviation, in response to external circumstances in the world at large, from the fundamental impulse towards democratization that allegedly characterized contemporary Japan. It was rather the expression of tacit elements harbored deep within the cultural sensibilities of the Japanese. Never having been taken seriously, let alone properly assimilated, once these elements reached the surface they were bound to assert themselves in exaggerated form. Consequently, while

9. Originally published as 『現代政治の思想と行動』 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964).

Maruyama recognizes certain parallels with Nazism and a common logic underlining them (which puts him squarely in line with Hannah Arendt), he is at pains to spell out the specificity of Japanese fascism. At the same time, a close study of Hegel and Marx made him distrustful of their philosophical views on historical necessity. He maintains throughout his faith in history as the “progress towards consciousness and freedom.” Here he shows his debt to the Enlightenment and its modern champions such as Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Nakae Chōmin.<sup>10</sup>

The first difficulty in identifying the specificity of Japanese nationalism, explains Maruyama, lies in its mixed nature. On the one hand, it belongs to the logic of modern European nationalism, after which it tried to model itself. On the other, it resembles Asian nationalism, to which it belongs historically. Asian nationalism (as seen in China, India, the nations of Southeast Asia) reached its high point in the period immediately following the war, manifesting itself in the form of revolutionary and anti-colonial nationalism, that is, as a struggle to liberate Asia from Western imperialism and from the local ruling classes collaborating with the latter. Although Japan shared the Asian ideal of an anti-imperialistic struggle, it distinguished itself from other Asian nations on three grounds. First, it had not been colonized in the strict sense by any Western power but had maintained its economic and political hegemony. Second, its nationalistic struggle for independence had been led by the ruling elite rather than by the people or the bourgeoisie. Finally, it had tried to ensure its own autonomy by producing a superior brand of European nationalism. This led it to colonial expansionism, notably, in the direction of its Asian neighbors.

10. More specifically, Maruyama shares Weber’s non-ideological sociological view of capitalism, Mannheim’s rationalistic approach to ideology and faith in the role of intellectuals, Fukuzawa’s interest in learning from modern Western science, and Nakae Chōmin’s conviction that a proper parliamentary system that defends the rights of the people is possible within Japanese society.

So it was, Maruyama argues, Japanese nationalism “lost its virginity,”<sup>11</sup> and even if it was no longer willing to measure itself against Westerner standards, it ended up repeating the same abuses. Moreover, since Japan’s nationalism had not fermented among the general populations but was the child of a ruling elite, it was quick to reproduce the capitalistic exploitation and authoritarianism that is the natural result of excessive government control (*étatisme*).

Compared to the West, however, Japanese nationalism was an ambiguous adventure. To be sure, the national consciousness of the nation-states of Europe was shaped against the background of a common belonging, a common civilization that reached back to the universal ambitions of the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire. This commonality in turn shaped the implicit consciousness of a formal “League of Nations,” the godchild of a commitment to universality shared by all the nations that made it up. In contrast, the great nations of Asia—India, China, and Japan—made up a relatively autonomous civilization of its own which, throughout all its mutual give-and-take, represented a relatively closed, ethnocentric domain that had been forced to open up to the rest of the world because of its often conflictual encounters with the West. Japan thus exposed itself to modern national consciousness not just in the hope of liberating itself from the Western ascendancy (as had the other Asian nations), but also in its distinctive desire to be assimilated into the society of nations that was forming in; the Western world.

Accordingly, if Japanese nationalism was at first something it shared in effect with its Asian neighbors, the will to “expel the barbarians” (尊王攘夷 *sonnō-jōi*) to avoid being overrun by them; and if, for that reason, it had built up its own power on the principles of “Western science, Japanese soul” (和魂洋才 *wakon yōsai*) and “prosperous nation, strong army” (富国強兵 *fukoku kyōhei*), it had changed radically in the process. In order to earn recognition on an equal footing with Western

11. MARUYAMA 1969, 137.

nations, it had to adopt not just the material and technical know-how of Western powers, but some elements of the *consensus juris* that govern the relations between nations. At least in its first stages.

By the dawn of the twentieth century Japan had reached economic and industrial parity with Western nations. But the social tensions caused by a too rapid industrialization had the effect not of leading it towards the progressive emancipation and sovereignty of the people, as had been the case in Europe, but rather of being dragged into reactionary and nationalistic policies imitating the methods of Western colonial imperialism and its proto-totalitarian tendencies. The contradiction in the West between *capitalistic expansion*, which led to exploitation, colonial imperialism, and massification of the people, and *democratization*, which led to emancipation and equal rights in their homelands, was resolved in Japan by an initial flirtation with political liberalism during the Taishō era, followed by a wholesale commitment to the former. This orientation took Japan down the slope we know all too well, bringing out its isolation from the international community to which it had originally aspired, as witnessed in its symbolic withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933.

The fascist transformation of Japan implied, as it had in Germany, a forced national cohesion that impeded popular aspirations to emancipation. Such cohesion was secured not merely through popular enthusiasm for expansion by way of colonization, annexation, and war abroad, all of which made people forget about tensions and repressions within the country, but also through a program of education and propaganda extolling the person of the Emperor as a concrete manifestation of national Japanese. As Maruyama is quick to point out, such a tendency was already in place from the time of the Meiji restoration and was simply radicalized during the fascist period. We have therefore to treat the temptation of some historians to a one-sided view of the Meiji era as if represented Japan's period of Enlightenment and the force behind the movement towards democratization, liberalization, emancipation, and rationalization from which ultra-nationalism

would be no more than a temporary aberration. In reality, interventionist and nationalist tendencies were already in place in the background of the drive to “modernization,” which in part explains the ease with which fascism was able to take root. In sum, what needs to be understood better is the nature of this predisposition to fascism that reaches back to Meiji and perhaps earlier.

To this end, it is first of all necessary to get a better sense of the psychology of a movement that Maruyama insists had no clear ideological structure of the sort we find in Nazism. Its doctrine was shrouded in a series of slogans—“Eight corners, one roof;” “Spread the imperial way to all corners of the earth;” “Establish a sphere of Co-prosperity for Greater East Asia;” and so forth—and yet the effect was a working ideology of remarkable psychological and persuasive efficiency.<sup>12</sup> The fact is, a largely unexpressed logic, spirit, and strength drove the ideology of Japanese fascism from behind and gave it a surprising cohesion capable of guiding the country with resolve despite a lack of will among the ruling class. Indeed, governments and cabinets resigned one after the other at such a surprising pace as rivals factions contested for political power among the politicians rivaled the situation in the military. Maruyama has this to say:

Looking at the developments from a wide-range or macroscopic point of view, we can, to be sure, discover a consistent sequence of cause and effect in the development of Japanese imperialism during this decade.

Viewed microscopically, however, it appears rather as the result of a vast accumulation of illogical decisions.<sup>13</sup>

It is precisely because plans for the country were so badly conceived

12. The main theorist of Japanese fascism is probably Kita Ikki 北一輝 (1883–1937) whose *General Outlines of Measures for the Reconstruction of Japan* was published in 1919. Kita’s program was anti-communist but at the same time included a proposal for “the emancipation of the Asian peoples.” Not only did he defend Japanese nationalism, therefore, but advocated a pan-Asian nationalism spearheaded by Japan.

13. MARUYAMA 1969, 87.

that Japanese decision makers were content to be guided by events that seemed as if they were being dictated from outside the government.

At this point the role of the state, whose functioning Maruyama traces back to the Meiji restoration, stands out in clear relief. The axiological neutrality of the liberal states of Europe left questions of ethical or confessional choice to the private sphere and restricted its public function in such matters to arbitration among individuals. The Japanese state, in contrast, had made concerted efforts since the Meiji era to control subjective moral values to the same extent as they controlled the external and objective laws of society. Consequently, little room was left for moral or civic conscience or for democratization. On the contrary, people were predisposed to submit to “fascism from above” during the 1930s and 1940s and thus to acquiesce to the total mobilization of minds undertaken during those years. Personal or private questions were not to be recognized as such but always made into a public affair; the private life of citizens were reduced to civic duty. Not in the least did the Japanese state encourage the appropriation of a private space for the exercise of individual freedoms. Rather, it strove to preserve the social values of Confucian ethics (filial piety and loyalty towards the sovereign and towards the group), politicized the sacred values of Shintō, and integrated them both a system increasingly subject to government control in which the Emperor signified the union of spiritual and political authority. As state control of subjective values moral, spiritual, political, and aesthetic batted and grew stronger, intellectual freedoms as well as scientific and philosophical research was obliged first and foremost to contribute to “the good of the nation.” In this way, we see that the essentially Western training of Japanese intellectuals, from Meiji to Shōwa, was exclusively “intellectual” and did little to transform their ethical and political perception of the world about them into a solid civic consciousness or sense of personal responsibility.

A cloud of reproach hung over everything of a private nature, not simply for matters like romantic love, but also on the level of pri-

vate enrichment. This meant that Japanese capitalism was only able to develop within the framework of service to the state, predisposing the country to nationalistic interventionism along the lines of Friedrich List rather to the liberal capitalism of Adam Smith.<sup>14</sup> This type of interventionism, in which there was no authority higher than the state, may evoke the absolutism of Hobbes, but in fact it is more radical still in that the latter is based on a pure pragmatism or on the arbitrary will of the sovereign, whereas the Japanese imperial system claimed to embody absolutely normative values inherited from an age-old and indisputable tradition reaching back to the gods who founded the country. These values were embodied in an Emperor considered to be, literally, the essence of the *kokutai* 国体 (“national body”) and “the eternal culmination of the true, the good, and the beautiful for all times and places” (Araki Sadao<sup>15</sup>). This is why, in such a context, national policy—that is to say, *imperial* policy—had to be in itself good, just, and true. Any dispute of that belief in the name of values external to official policy could only mean significant political conflict.

At this stage, the identification of morality with power went so far as to measure the criteria of morality in terms of the degree of power. Because citizens had no access to the power of the state, the state naturally became the undisputed locus of all possible moral and legal values. This was to become truer as the state became stronger and also more triumphant in terms of political achievements both at home in Japan and abroad. This also is why, in the arena of international relations, imperial Japan tended to create alliances with the strongest countries, independently of any moral concerns. At last, during the fascist period, when the Japanese state felt itself sufficiently powerful, it was able to adopt a politics of *fait accompli* and have no scruples about exiting

14. On the role played by Friedrich List in Asian capitalism, see STEVENS 1997.

15. Cited in MARUYAMA 1969, 8. Araki Sadao 荒木貞夫 (1877–1966) was a right-wing military extremist. During the 1945 trials he was first condemned to life imprisonment and later pardoned in 1955.

from the moral and legal consensus of a League of Nations, which it openly despised in favor its own adherence to the law of the strongest.

Thus, even before the emergence of fascism, and hence also before the rise of Nazi Germany, the assumption was that strength creates the laws, not principles. However, unlike Nazi-style Machiavellianism, which took satanic delight in trampling on openly “bourgeois morality,” Japanese national policy was never fully conscious of its own lack of morality. Quite the contrary, national policy at all levels was carried out in the name of a supreme morality and a particularly scrupulous sense of duty. In the end, the Japanese demagogues of the imperial way actually believed in their own slogans. Indeed, this is precisely what they maintained in their defense during post-war trials: their process: “They did wrong truly believing they were doing right.” Furthermore, whereas Nazis leaders were in general dropouts from the mob, the top echelons the Japanese hierarchy were surrounded by an aura of respectability while the real *rōnin* 浪人, the thugs operating in the shadows outside the law, creating the *faits accomplis* that the leaders had then to ratify into official policy. It was easier to appeal to personal responsibility during the Nuremberg trials than it was during the Tokyo trials. The difference between the two cultural contexts, writes Maruyama, is that moral appropriation (Hegel’s *Moralität*) had never really been developed in Japan, whereas in Germany it needed to be actively and intentionally destroyed so that Nazi cynicism might flood in unimpeded.

Within the imperial system, the Japanese individual was not a free subject but a subject of the Emperor. Inflexibility in behavior often masked a profound weakness of character or even of personality. The social role of imperial subjects, as well their moral behavior, were conditioned by their place within the hierarchy, which in turn was determined by their relative proximity to the Emperor, the supreme seat of legitimacy and power. Therefore it was the imperial army, “the essence of the nation,” that represented the most advanced form of “vertical” duty, along together with the typical morality and pride that accom-



pany it. Hierarchically closer to the Emperor than ordinary civilians, members of the armed forces looked on civilians with contempt, which they, in turn, transferred to representatives of other nations.

Here we have a clear instance of the “onion structure” that Arendt attributes to totalitarian organization. Stalinism, Hitlerism, and *ten-nō*-centrism all have in common the establishment of a hierarchy in which the leader serves as a blind center from which all authority flows, drop by drop, so that no level in the system, bureaucratic or military, should feel itself responsible but rather, as Maruyama points out, transfer the oppression suffers to the level just below it. Paradoxically, the more efficiently the system works the more likely it is to be turned on its head so that, in a sense, “the bottom governs the top.” That is to say, frustrations felt at the base implicitly require higher-ups to take tougher and tougher positions towards those on whom the base must transfer those frustrations. Thus, for example, military expansionist adventures grant legitimacy to a more radicalized activism at the lower levels. Throughout it all, the “system of irresponsibility” and the “transfer of oppression” remain intact and are reinforced.

In the case of Europe, dictatorship was the price to be paid for this kind of hierarchical organization, and that means a calculated blend of conscious despotism, the destruction of civil society, and the smothering of private morality and political responsibility. In Japan such a strategy would not only have been foreign to traditional social order, it would have been unnecessary. There was nothing to be destroyed. Rather than behave like responsible individuals, the chief political decision makers, ministers, and members of the military-industrial oligarchy considered themselves obliged to laws of which they were merely the vehicles. The historical mission of the nation, indebtedness to the ancestors, the demands of the base, the atrocities carried out by the *rōnin*—all these pressured any sense of civic responsibility into irrelevance.

The actual role of the Emperor was more like that of a constitutional monarch. He did not so much concentrate effective power in

his own person as symbolize a center and summit of power that was in itself empty. It was a pretext for the whole hierarchy, not its regent. In the end, since the Emperor was a descendant of the gods, the heir of an ancestral tradition, and an incarnation of eternal values, he was the medium for a higher dimension. Far from generating the norms, he was merely their instrument. The very term “Meiji restoration” signal the commitment to return to an older order of things from time immemorial, an order from which shogunal power was a temporary deviation. The absoluteness of the Emperor set the same scale of Japan’s vocation: to submit the whole planet to a hierarchy of nations not unlike to the feudal relationship of suzerainty, the place of each nation being determined by its relative proximity to Japan.

For these reasons Maruyama concludes that the Japanese state since the Meiji era was predisposed to fascism. The fascist period in Japan, running roughly from 1935 to 1945, is characterized by the radicalization of a government control that had already been in place for half a century. Maruyama concludes:

From the time of the Pacific War the Tōjō dictatorship reduced political freedom as far as possible, in fact almost to the zero point. Yet the essential conditions for such a state of affairs had all existed previously; so far as fascist evolution is concerned, this period was simply a development in volume and did not differ in quality from the previous period.<sup>16</sup>

### III

It is not possible here to line up all of the conclusions of Maruyama’s analyses of Japanese fascism, but only to underline some of the many perspectives it opens up.

1. Maruyama shows how Japanese ultranationalism is also, to some extent, a result of the Western-oriented modernization of Japan since Meiji. Japan seems thus to have taken more from the totalitarian poten-

16. MARUYAMA, 1969, 33–4.

tial of European modernity, so forcefully described by Arendt, than from its properly humanistic and emancipatory potential. In doing so, he invited us to rethink the unpleasant aspects of European modernity instead of focusing only on its progressive achievements.

2. This paradoxical conclusion of Maruyama's work on Japanese fascism recalls the paradox of an important earlier study of his on the neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa period.<sup>17</sup> In that work, Maruyama describes the beginnings of a truly progressive and humanistic style of modern political consciousness, notably the distinction between the private and the public that the Meiji era had swiped aside. Such native political consciousness, shaped independently of any European influence, seems to suggest the need for further inquiry into these unexploited dimensions of modernity in Japan as a way to enrich the often problematic debates still going on today regarding modernity and its possible overcoming.

3. The development of humanism to which Maruyama draws our attention focuses on the progressive distinction between the private and the public sphere, but it also entails a disruption of the natural-ethical continuum that grounded neo-Confucianist models of social hierarchy.

Another aspect of this Asian humanism can be found in what Watsuji Tetsurō interpretation of *ningen* 人間 or “human being” as composed of two kanji, “person” (*nin* 人) and “relationships” between persons (*gen* 間).<sup>18</sup> The human being, he argues, is fundamentally a communal or group reality (a *Mitsein*, a being-with-others). The individual, driven to isolation in the massification of society, is thus seen as an abstraction of this essential togetherness. Might this now shed some light on what Arendt means when she speaks of the common world of human actions as the basis for any free political life?

17. See 『日本政治思想史研究』 (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1952). English translation: MARUYAMA 1989.

18. WATSUJI 1945.

4. My allusion to Watsuji suggests another consequence of Arendt's and Maruyama's analyses of totalitarianism. Even my brief resume of their views seems to offer fresh insight into the "participation" of Kyōto-School philosophers in Japan's wartime regime. We know that the Navy, which was far less radical than the Army and sought a more acceptable solution to the impending war against the United States, contacted a number of philosophers associated with the Kyōto School to organize discussions that they hoped would have favorable influence on the fate of Japan.<sup>19</sup> The results were the famous symposium on "Overcoming Modernity" and the discussions on "Japan and the Standpoint of World History" published in the pages of the *Chūōkōron* magazine. I do not wish to engage in arguments over who as a sympathizer and who a resister, or to what extent they held to their positions. I would only stress that the Kyoto School philosophers, whatever they said, represented a serious threat for the regime for the simple reason that they were thinking freely. What is more, they drew on both Western and Buddhist modes of thought, both of which were most unwelcome to the ruling powers. In this context I recall Arendt's remark:

... under totalitarian conditions... every thought that deviates from the officially prescribed and permanently changing line is already suspect, no matter in which field of human activity it occurs. Simply because of their capacity to think, human beings are suspect by definition.<sup>20</sup>

Ideology is designed to destroy the freedom of thought that defines our very humanity, and the totalitarian system of terror is meant to radicalize that destruction to the point of doing away with individuals as legal, moral, and finally even physical persons. Thinking freely is the first line of resistance against a totalitarian movement, and this is precisely what the Kyoto School philosophers did.

5. I would further suggest that extending the analysis of totalitar-

19. See ŌHASHI, 2001.

20. ARENDT 1973, 430

ianism from Stalinism and Hitlerism to *tennō*-centrism can help us understand events we are witnessing today such as the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, particularly as we see it in the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Looking at the ideological fictions at work in each of the previous cases we see the “laws of history,” “laws of nature,” and “law of the gods” becoming thus more and more religious and, in a sense, irrational. In the case of the Islamic State we have “sharia,” the so-called religious law of Allah which by essence is superior to all human law and thus to be imposed on all Muslims and eventually on all people, even the unfaithful, on a global level. All the elements of totalitarianism are present here. It is not a political party but a movement, whose dynamics is a constant radicalization and whose means of influence are armed force and terror aimed at world domination. It is not yet a mass movement since the mass of Muslims it is trying to reach throughout the planet remains by and large unmoved. But it has created a system of estranging isolated individuals from their normal environment in order to attract them to the inner structure of an increasingly ideologically radical activism. Once there, individuals are transformed into “jihadists.” They are dehumanized and rendered capable of the utter inhumanity of total war, crime, and terror, with no consideration whatsoever for the humanity of their victims. Nothing less than our common humanity is in danger of total destruction here, the humanity of both the victims and the perpetrators.

6. These concerns are not restricted to the fascism and totalitarianism of Islamic fundamentalism. There is also the danger that a strong counterreaction within our own nation-states, still run by the rule of law, might lead to a progressive debilitation of the very legal framework that protects our rights and liberties. Maruyama saw this danger in the McCarthy witch-hunts during the 1950s in the US.<sup>21</sup> More recently, people in the US have been troubled over the Patriot Act enacted after

21. Notably in an article entitled: “Fascism— Some Problems: A Consideration of its Political Dynamics” (TB, pp. 157-176).

9/11. Nor is Europe today immune from risk—far from it. As intellectuals, we must therefore beware and remain on watch. Scrutinize, try to understand, and prevent. Or as Buddhism tells us: Be aware, be ever mindful.

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