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# UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

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THE INDIVIDUAL AND INDIVIDUALISM IN NISHIDA AND TANABE

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*1. The Logic of Place and the Problem of the Individual*

The theme of the individual is an important key to understand Nishida Kitarō's and Tanabe Hajime's philosophical theories. In fact, it exposes their intrinsically Modern nature, which brings them to inquire the philosophical and/or religious dimensions of the individual. Politics becomes part of this picture in different ways. Some rudiments of political individualism can be found in Nishida, but with limited result. He especially develops a individualism theoretically, without really being able to acquire a political dimension. On the contrary, a developed political philosophy is at the core of Tanabe's thinking in the thirties. However, although political in its articulation, Tanabe's position resembles a religious way of salvation, in which the confrontation between individual and society is at the center of the philosopher's concern.

In this paper, my aim is to summarize their fundamental thinking on this theme and their attitude toward individualism. I have chosen to start from the crucial period of their diatribe about the so-called Logic of Place (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理), from 1927 on. This theoretical output by Nishida marks the beginning of a philosophical *querelle* with Tanabe about the relationship between individual and universal. Starting from this period, they both modify their thought in quite different directions. Therefore, it seems to me particularly suited to underline their different approach to the theme in question. After briefly recalling the fundamental meaning of the Logic of Place, I will deepen the problem of the individual and individualism in their wartime philosophies.

In the Logic of Place, Nishida finds in the search for the True Subject an important source of philosophical inspiration. In fact, as stated in the work *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e* (働くものから見るものへ From the Acting to the Seeing, 1924-27, now in *NKZ IV*), it is in name of the true face of individual things that he refuses the Aristotelian and Kantian philosophies, reading them as representatives of respectively the irrational and the rational approaches to Reality. This interpretation leads him to radically reconsider the way of subsuming things in the universals: as is known, the philosopher builds a new logical-

ontological theory, called “Logic of Place”, in which the universal, or Place, of Judgment – very similar to the Kantian notion of Transcendental Apperception, or ‘I-think’ – disappears in a Place of Absolute Nothingness (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所), in order to let the things appear in their suchness (*ari no mama* 有りの侏).<sup>1</sup> Nishida’s anti-subjectivist tendency to dismiss consciousness as theoretical reference point brings him to define the True Subject as “the Predicate that cannot become Subject”, this Predicate being the extreme limit of universal: the Place (or universal) of Absolute Nothingness, being Nothingness, is actually identical with the True Individual Thing, disappearing in it. This approach to the problem, though an internal movement of consciousness, is already opened to the world of things. However, the Logic of Place is still belonging to the realm of interiority, of consciousness. This is exactly the aspect that leads Tosaka Jun to criticize Nishida’s Logic, accusing him of lacking dialectical character.<sup>2</sup>

From a slightly different standpoint, but equally eager to stress the importance of the dimension of the relative, Tanabe Hajime objects that the Logic of Place is a mystic emanationism (*hasshutsuron* 発出論), in which all things appear as *direct* self-determinations of the universal, whereas this lack of mediation is unacceptable, because it mortifies the relative (See e.g. *THZ IV*: 305-328).

These critical stances by Tanabe, Tosaka and others stimulate Nishida to focus on the world of things, even if still on the basis of the ontology of the Logic of Place. The subsequent historicism focuses especially on the problem of knowledge-as-action (the dimension of “Active Intuition”, or *kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観); on the dialectical, historical world (*rekishiteki sekai* 歴史的世界) and the historical bodily self (*rekishiteki shintaiteki jiko* 歴史の身体的自己); and finally on the functioning principles of the interrelated, dialectical world. This is the conception of absolutely contradictory self-identity (*zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu* 絶対矛盾の自己同一) (See Kōsaka 1949: 163 ff.).

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *NKZ IV*: 221. I discussed these themes in the essay *Cestari* (in printing).

<sup>2</sup> Tosaka Jun criticizes the philosophy of Nishida for being dialectical only in the sense of a “consciousness of dialectics” and not of a “dialectics itself”, i.e. of real world. “[...] In Nishida philosophy only the question of how one becomes conscious of the dialectic – how one is able to think of it – becomes a problem; the dialectic itself is not thematized.” (*Tosaka Jun Zenshū*, Vol. II, Tōkyō, Keisō Shobō, 1966, pp. 340-349. Translation by D. Dilworth and V. Vigieli in *Tosaka 1998*: 368. NOTE: Except where differently indicated, the translations from Japanese are mine.

On the contrary, Tanabe tries to elaborate a logic, which may overcome this supposed emanationism, reconsidering the relationship between universal and individual, in light of the (logical and historical) particular, or species/specific. This orientation will give birth to the Logic of Species (*shu no ronri* 種の論理). In this paper, I will first consider the problem of the individual in the last Nishida and then I will treat the same question in Tanabe's coeval philosophy. While in Nishida the political dimension of this theme is minimal, being the philosopher concentrated almost exclusively on a more theoretical level, in Tanabe, politics is *apparently* crucial, even if, more than a really political philosophy, it is a religious, moral and existential way of self-realization.

## 2. *The Ontological Dimension of the Individual in Nishida's Historicism*

With the work *Watakushi to nanji* (私と汝 I and Thou, 1932, now in *NKZ VI*: 321-427) Nishida begins to focus on the objective and inter-subjective side of the world, focusing more on the interrelated nature of human being, than on its consciousness. However, it is only in Nishida's final thinking, from about 1934 on, that the self-sufficient, balanced relationship among the Two is broken through by the relationship with the Third, so that the Other comes to be explicitly considered as such. This new perspective is generally addressed to as the "dialectical world" (*benshōhōteki sekai* 弁証法的世界), in which the individuals interact with each other and with the world. In historicism, Nishida shows interest in the problem of the historical, and also political, world.<sup>3</sup>

Before deepening the theme in question, I would first clarify those terms adopted by Nishida to indicate the "individual". *Kobutsu* 個物 is used in a metaphysical context, and is by far the most common word in his writings; *ko* 個, especially if juxtaposed to *shu* 種 (species) and *rui* 類 (gender), generally appears in a logical context; *kotai* 個体 has the practical meaning of an "individual (*kobutsu*) that has a body" (see e.g. *NKZ XII*: 312); and finally *kojin* 個人 has a more political and less metaphysical connotation, as with the

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<sup>3</sup> The movement toward historicism is well explained by Huh 1990, who clearly speaks of a historicist turn in the development of the Japanese philosopher. This reading is convergent with some classical interpretations of Nishida, such as Kōsaka 1947. Recently, Heisig 2001: 104 admittedly does not recognize any stage of development in Nishida's intellectual history, but his thesis is quite controversial (see e.g. Davis 2002:

compound *kojinshugi* 個人主義 (individualism). The spread of this lexical geography reveals the degree of Nishida's different interests. Certainly, we can say that the prevailing orientation is much more metaphysical than political. In fact, since the beginning the main interest of our philosopher is oriented to the problem of the ontological structure of knowledge, to the structure of the world and the self.

I will try to summarize Nishida's conception of the individual in the historicist period. However, it must be preliminarily observed that since the turn to historicism does not occur suddenly, but it takes some years to modify in a consistent way the previous philosophical direction, the notion of individual too is subject to some changes. In fact, at the beginning of the so called historicism, for example in the text of a conference held at the Shinano Philosophical Society in 1935,<sup>4</sup> Nishida approaches the individual in terms of interiority, even if already *within* the general logical structure of "unity of contradictions" (*mujun no tōitsu* 矛盾の統一), a concept which will be better specified later as the "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾的自己同一), that would allow the foundation of all the oppositions, interiority/exteriority included. However, in an essay dated only few years later, Nishida clearly states that the True individual is not a matter of thinking (interiority), but of action (exteriority).<sup>5</sup> This shift is essential to discuss the theme of individualism, as well as some aspects of Nishida's philosophy, such as the problem of anthropocentrism, recently raised by James Heisig (Heisig 2001: 265-267), upon which I will briefly touch later.

In the Shinano conference of 1935, Nishida thinks that, in the history of philosophy, two ways of conceiving the individual are particularly significant: the Aristotelian conception of *hypokeimenon* (the substrate-subject that cannot become predicate) and Leibniz's idea of monad.<sup>6</sup> In the first notion, the individual is thought of as the extreme limit of the universal.

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160-164).

<sup>4</sup> The conference, entitled *Genjitsu no sekai no ronriteki kōzō* (The Logical Structure of the World of Reality, NKZ XIV: 214-264) has the same content (just simplified) of an essay, of the same title, contained in *Tetsugaku no konpon mondai zokuhen* (1934), now in NKZ VII: 217-304. Another cycle of five conferences (same title and similar content) was held by Nishida at Ōtani University in 1932 (now in NKZ XIV: 419-505).

<sup>5</sup> The essay in question is *Rekishiteki sekai ni oite no kobutsu no tachiba* 歴史的世界に於いての個物の立場 (The Position of the Individual in the Historical World, 1938), now in NKZ IX: 69-146.

<sup>6</sup> NKZ XIV: 223 ff. In this context, the founders of liberal individualism – such as Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Smith, Stuart Mill, Tocqueville, etc. – are not considered and I think that this is a choice, not a

In the second, the individuals (monads) are considered as absolutely independent, having “neither doors nor windows”. Hence, these two positions are interpreted to be opposite: in Aristotle, the individual is interrelated but not independent; in Leibniz, the individual is independent but not interrelated (*NKZ XIV: 225-226*). However, since the individual should be considered both in its objective (Aristotle’s individual as the limit of the universal) and subjective (Leibniz’s individual as self determining) aspects, this partiality is unacceptable. In fact: “[...] it could be said that, thinking at one part from the opposite side, we unavoidably disregard the character of one part and the concrete world is not thought of, but it becomes an abstract [object]” (*NKZ XIV: 241*).

This rejection of partiality is at work also in the analysis of the two possible relationships, inner or outer, of the individual. In the inner relationship, as with thinking about oneself, the temporal relationship is particularly relevant: it consists of an internal movement that allows the individual’s continuity between its past, present and future. In the internal relationship between individuals, the materialistic explanation is insufficient: when, for example, the same idea appears both in the writer and the reader, this relationship cannot be explained simply in materialistic terms. On the contrary, a universal individual (a self that expands and becomes universally understandable) appears, something that is not “only me” anymore, but it reduces the gap between the Thou and the I, as well as between the ‘I of yesterday’ and the ‘I of today’ (*NKZ XIV: 245-247*).

An outer relationship implies that the individual is reduced to a universal common to other individuals. Here, the outer relationship cancels the individual as such, which becomes part of the external world, as with scientific laws. In both inner or outer relationships, the individual is reduced to universal, be it a universal individual, or a universal common to other individuals. Because of such a partiality, these conceptions are both wrong. In fact, coherently with the Logic of Place, they are both universals, and thus they cannot ultimately express the individual as such (*NKZ XIV: 230*). The widest position is the dialectical structure of unity and opposition, here addressed to as “unity of contradictions” (*mujun no*

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lacuna. Certainly, Nishida’s intellectual background has more links with Idealism and Spiritualism in general, than with English and French liberal thinking. However, it should be noted that here the context is more theoretical than political. Moreover, there is a structural meaning in this choice: Aristotle and Leibniz are clearly used to theoretically justify the need for a medium (*baikaisha*), as a ground for the independent individuals, upon which their individuality be maintained as is, without being reduced to any universal (*NKZ*

*tōitsu* 矛盾の統一), and later called “contradictory self-identity” (*mujunteki jikodōitsu*). This structure is said to be dialectical, but not in the sense of Marx, who according to Nishida considers only the universal, disregarding the individual and its complexity (*NKZ XIV: 230; 241-242*). Since the world is multi-layered, namely its attributes are the opposite and yet coexistent characteristics of time (the order of unity) and space (the order of differentiation), the individual too must reflect this structure. In fact, even if it is profoundly linked to time and consciousness, this does not imply, as with Spiritualism, to consider only the “vertical line” of time/subject/consciousness/individual, disregarding the “horizontal line” of space/object/external world/universal. Of course it does not imply to adhere to the opposite direction of Materialism either. In fact, if Spiritualism negates the objective, external dimension of the world, Materialism negates consciousness, the individual, since it reduces it to the objective universal (*NKZ XIV: 241 ff.*). The individual is part of the world, i.e. it belongs to its temporal aspect, as opposed (and complementary) to the spatial aspect. This means that consciousness and the individual are but one aspect of the world, not the only one, as Idealism and Spiritualism generally affirm.

Here, it must be noted that even if the structure of the world is not reducible to any single dimension whatsoever, the individual is said to belong to the “vertical line”, together with time, subjectivity and consciousness. This quite traditional notion of the “interior individual” – similar to the Augustinian conception of time as *distensio animi* – is innovated by Nishida in that this Spiritualist “vertical line” is complementary to the Materialist “horizontal line”. In other words, the individual is inscribed in a wider world, which is *both* vertical and horizontal.

The distance from the Logic of Place is all in this shift to open philosophy to the dimension of the dialectical/complex world. However, in the position of later historicism, another shift is evident in that the individual seems much less dependent on interiority. In the introductory remarks of the essay *Rekishiteki sekai ni oite no kobutsu no tachiba* (歴史的世界に於いての個物の立場 The Place of the Individual in the Historical World, 1938), Nishida seems to go straight in the opposite direction of his own thesis of some years before:



“Through introspection (*naisei* 内省) in ourselves, we think to know the self that directly acts, starting from ourselves; we think to exert our free will. Thinking that what exists by itself, what acts by itself, is the individual (*kobutsu*), which entirely determines itself, [then] *there is no individual, starting from our self*. We can know the True Individual, through our self-introspection. However, *to consider the acting (hataraku) self only through introspection is but a totally subjective [matter]; [in this context,] free will too is perhaps a hallucination (sakkaku 錯覚)*. It could also be said that Descartes’ *Cogito ergo sum* may have various meanings. When it is stated that there must be a dreaming self, even if what is seen in the present is a dream; or that what doubts of the self’s existence is still the self, this [way of thinking] could already be said logic, as far as it is dialectic. However, *this is a conscious self and not an acting self. Consequently, it is not really individual*” (NKZ IX: 69, italic mine).

This passage is telling in many respects, especially if we confront it with Nishida’s position of only few years before, where, as we already saw, even in the historicist perspective, the individual is squarely considered to be part of the dimension of interiority within the world (See e.g. NKZ XIV: 241). From this point of view, Nishida’s shift is impressive: here he fundamentally recants his same previous affirmations, especially those of the so-called logicistic period. In brief, if the title of the inaugurating collection of essays of that period was, as said before, “From the Acting to the Seeing”, here this motto could be reversed into the opposite: “From the Seeing to the Acting”.

Accordingly, for Nishida the conception of human being as historical body (*rekishiteki shintai* 歴史的身体) can be interpreted also as a way to overcome the predominance of Pure Consciousness within his own philosophy, thanks to a reflection on the relationship that human beings have with and within the world. In sum, the shift from logicism to historicism, from an interiority-centered theory (*homo interior*) to an exteriority-centered one (*homo exterior*) (see e.g. NKZ XII: 18-30) is significant also in the context of the theory of the individual.

These considerations can help introducing the characteristics which the last Nishida ascribes to it. At least three important aspects can be detected: a) independence, b) self-determination, c) self-expression and creativity. The first two features are directly drawn by Leibniz’s monadology and chronologically emerge sooner. The third one on the contrary

appears later, but, once emerged, it seems to be considered as the most characterizing aspect of the individual.

First of all, the individual must be independent (*dokuritsu* 独立), but not in the sense of being grounded on something of its own (*dokuji* 独自). This independence therefore is not opposed to the relationship with the others (see *e.g.* *NKZ XIV*: 214; 223). Although independent, the individual is related to other individuals. In fact, a lone individual cannot simply exist. It has a grounding relationship with the others, since, for example, it is born from them (its parents) and so on. This makes it impossible to consider the individual as absolute (*NKZ XIV*: 227; 245-246). I am I in front of Thou and without the Thou there is no I (*NKZ XIV*: 247). This feature could be in tune with the idea of “Discontinuous Continuity” (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続): the individual is at the same time completely independent and completely dependent. Hence, an individual is never isolated, as with many important thinkers of classical individualism.

Secondly, the individual must act by itself (*jibun* 自分). It must determine itself by itself and it must not depend on others. In other words, it must be autonomous (see *e.g.* *NKZ XIV*: 225). Just like the first feature, this characteristic can work both as internal and external dimensions. On the contrary, the third quality – self-expression – is explicitly linked to the horizon of praxis and creativity, namely of the Historical World and its dialectical structure. In his mature historicism, Nishida particularly insists on this character of the individual, which is said to be radically creative, and to form history, to the point that the true problem of the individual can be summarized in that of its concrete action. Hence, the individual is not a problem of interiority (consciousness) anymore, but of action, namely of exteriority.<sup>7</sup> In the world of absolutely contradictory self-identity, each individual determines itself through expressive action, which does not belong to the world of physics, where the individuals are thought of as simple points. Nor can be it accomplished in the world of life, where the individual expresses its form with no individual creation. Only in the world of human history the individual determines itself with expressive action (*NKZ IX*:

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<sup>7</sup> *NKZ IX*: 151 ff. See many writings from his *Philosophical Essays (Tetsugaku ronbunshū* 哲学論文集), such as *Zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu* (絶対矛盾的自己同一 Absolutely Contradictory Self-identity, 1939) (*NKZ IX*: 147-222), as well as the above cited essay *Rekishiteki sekai ni oite no kobutsu no tachiba*.

171 ff.). In expression, it possesses itself in the very fact of negating itself and it is part of the world that forms itself. Hence, the individual brings with itself the transformation of the world (NKZ IX: 175-176). This expressive character is somehow already present among animals, according to their degree of consciousness. Only if there is a conscious/critical attitude, true expression is present. Hence, only in the Historical World there is a movement from the Created to the Creating, and not simply a movement from a Created to another Created (NKZ IX: 176). While the biological world is only partially subjective (NKZ IX: 177), the individuals in their bodily dimensions (*kotai* 个体) are characterized by a “desire of production” (*seisaku no yokkyū* 製作の欲求) (NKZ IX: 178-179). This formative activity through expression is equivalent to our self-formation as parts of the world and to the self-formation of the world as negative unification of the individual’s multiplicity. It becomes the most advanced edge of the world’s process of self-transformation. In fact, the world determines itself in the direction of the individual, i.e. by becoming the individual, while the individual becomes the world about which it is thinking.<sup>8</sup> In this process, the historical body functions as a principle of individuation.<sup>9</sup> This means that Nishida’s position considers the human world as the most human – and at the same time most natural – world. While Nishida’s discourse about the individual is for the most part essentially ontological, here and there other important aspects can be sporadically isolated. For example, in one section of the essay *Zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu* (絶対矛盾的自己同一, The Absolutely Contradictory Self-Identity, 1938; now in NKZ IX: 147-222), Nishida concentrates on the religious-existential meaning of the individual: the individual is such in the confrontation with the Absolute, which requires its life and death. In the process of active intuition, i.e. of creatively knowing the world, we face the Absolute. If we do not face it, we lose our individuality, being reduced to mechanistic or teleological elements (NKZ IX: 188 ff.). The individual is such because it faces absolutely contradictory self-identity. Since it is a being that lives and dies, the individual must confront Absolute Nothingness in its own death and birth (NKZ IX: 190-191). What urges us in such an inescapable way is not a logical, but an

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<sup>8</sup> This concept is expressed by the idea of *kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観 or “Active Intuition” (see e.g. NKZ XI: 381). For an analysis of this concept, see Cestari 1998.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Active Intuition is a praxis (*jissen*), because it creates things outside the body and at the same time it is an extension of bodily movement (See NKZ VIII: 550).

existential Absolute (Ibid.); it is the One World. The more our self is an individual (and the present is absolute), the more our knowledge is objective (NKZ IX: 196-197). In this confrontation with the Absolute World, our very soul (*tamashii* 魂), not only our existence, is negated. In fact, the world makes our lives possible, and yet it kills our souls (NKZ IX: 201).

Some commentators think that Nishida's philosophy, as well as the entire Kyoto School, is dominated by the theme of consciousness. This was the opinion by Nishida's direct disciples such as Tosaka Jun, as well as today's critics (see e.g. Heisig 2001). This problem implies the question of anthropocentrism, which Heisig finds as one possible and fatal pitfall of the Kyoto School philosophical conception (Heisig 2001: 263-269). This criticism is certainly right in indicating anthropocentrism as an unexpected and ironic result of the Kyoto critique of Western conception of Subject. In fact, even if criticizing it, the Kyoto School does not entirely break free from its dependence on pure, non-subjective but firmly human consciousness, which becomes the unconfessed center of their philosophy (Heisig 2001: 266). Consequently, the ethical problem of the Other, the metaphysical and practical problem of the "outer world" would be considered on the basis of this predominance of Self-Identity. This critical position catches some important aspects of the thought of Nishida and Tanabe. It has the advantage to find a theoretically strong interpretation for the weakness of these philosophies toward the dimensions that go beyond consciousness, politics and morality included. However, it is highly dubious that we can consider Nishida's philosophy as irremediably tainted with anthropocentrism, as Heisig is saying: this criticism is partially true, as far as the first periods are concerned, but it is not completely valid for the last period. More than anthropocentrism, I think that Nishida's real problem is his logicism, *i.e.* his way of looking at the world from an *abstractly symmetrical* point of view, through which he blurs the dimensions of Finite and Infinite, as Suzuki Tōru correctly stigmatizes. (Suzuki 1977: 147-148)

### *3. The Political Individualism in the Last Nishida*

Before dealing with political individualism, it is important to remember that Nishida has briefly discussed the individual according to many viewpoints: psychological,

anthropological and, although rarely, also legal and economical perspectives.<sup>10</sup> For example, in a psychological context, the individual is considered especially for its links with self-consciousness. Thanks to it, the individual can critically look at its own past and future: “I can judge myself and critically think, putting myself in front of myself” (*NKZ XIV*: 246). This, in other words, implies a critical stance toward oneself and, ultimately, freedom. From the point of view of sociology and anthropology, the philosopher thinks that the human societies, unlike other non-human groups, must contain the individual, however primitive they be. Hence, the individual in the human race is not only submitted to the group, but it can also rise against the group. As with Malinowski, Nishida assumes that since their beginnings primitive societies included the individual (*kojin*), for example, as consciousness of sin (*NKZ IX*: 181-182). As a consequence, being individual is part of human nature and not a matter of historical contingency.

It is worth noting however that Nishida’s position about individual freedom has much to do with ontology, religion and psychology, and much less with politics and morality. In a sense, the orientation toward the outer world, shown in the historicism, becomes a kind of metaphysical viewpoint of the world outside, and it does not really imply a change from metaphysics to practical philosophy. This prevailing interest in metaphysics explains also why Nishida is so deeply concerned with the philosophical dimension of individualism, while remaining almost silent on its political side. This could also make more understandable the evident hiatus between the importance given by the philosopher to intellectual freedom, on one hand, and the critical stance toward ethical and political individualism, on the other.

As a typical case of this “attitude gap” between intellectual freedom and political individualism, I shall quote the essay *Gakumonteki hōhō* (学問の方法 The Scholarly Method, 1937-40) (now in *NKZ XII*: 385-394), allegedly written as an apology of freedom in scholarly research during the climax of ultra-nationalist censorship in Japan. Here, Nishida insists on the importance of critical consciousness, trying to differentiate it from individualism:

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<sup>10</sup> For example, in *NKZ IX*: 184 Nishida sketchily indicates a legal and economic meaning of being individual: forming the world and itself, the individual possesses itself objectively and this property (*zaisan* 財産) must be recognized in legal terms. However, these traces of economic interest in his philosophy remain

“Today, there is often the tendency to reject theoretical thinking as it were individualism and liberalism, but actually without understanding it. Of course, ideas such as a nation’s society (*kokka shakai* 国家社会) based on mere individual freedom must be rejected. However, a simple negation of the individual, of freedom and so forth is nothing but tyranny. Rationalism too is superficially rejected. Those who simply reject it are simple irrationalists. If individual freedom disappears, there is no creation. A concrete principle of lively development must contain [these ideas] (in research, freedom must be assured; whenever a certain thesis is imposed from the beginning, there is no research). Today in the intellectual milieu few will vindicate ideas such as rationalism, individualism and liberalism as they were thought of at the end of the Eighteenth Century. Even more Marxism rejects very radically these ideas” (*NKZ XII*: 393-394).

This quotation is very representative of Nishida’s twofold attitude toward the individual: on one side, he discards individualism and Liberalism, or better political, social and ethical emancipation. On the other, he highly evaluates critical attitude and intellectual freedom, since this is an essential aspect of effective creation.

I think that here Nishida shows all his limitations in dealing with the political side of the individual. It is clear that he undervalues the importance of political individualism, which is definitely not an essential part of his thinking: he simply discards it without any articulated reason: individualism is liquidated only invoking a generic *Zeitgeist* (i.e. “individualism is outdated”), with no serious criticism, as it can be read wherever he speaks about it. His main interest in individual lies in metaphysics and the political aspect remains marginal.

Even if other social and political themes, such as the nation, or Japanese culture, are more or less extensively considered in some essays, we hardly find a treatise about political individualism. Generally, we must be satisfied with some vague hints in several more or less “political” writings. One of them is the famous lesson held in front of the emperor in 1941,<sup>11</sup> in which, after having expressed his idea that the nation has a world nature,<sup>12</sup> he

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marginal.

<sup>11</sup> *Goshinkō sōan. Rekishi tetsugaku ni tsuite* (御進講草案・歴史哲学ニツイテ, About the Philosophy of History. Trace of the Lesson Held in Front of the Emperor. The text of the lesson (now in *NKZ XII*: 267-272), originally held in 1941, was published in the collection of essays “*Zoku shisaku to taiken*” igo (「続思索と体験」以後, After “Thinking and Experience. Part II”), published posthumous in 1948.

<sup>12</sup> “[...] Today, because of the development of communication, the entire world has become one world. Today’s nationalism must be thought of from this standpoint. It is not a nationalism in which each country must return to itself, but a nationalism in which each country holds its own position inside this world. In other terms, I think that it is a nationalism in which every country must be global (*sekaiteki*)” (*NKZ XII*: 270-271).

condenses his conceptions about the relationship between the nation and the individual as follows:

“I think that a definition of the meaning of what is the world-historical character of one nation would be a radical totalitarianism without being at the same time a simple negation of the individual, but it would **take** the individual’s creation **as** the medium (*baikai*). Today it can be considered that individualism and totalitarianism oppose each other, but it goes without saying that individualism is outdated; however, a simple totalitarianism that negates the individual is but a part of the past, as well. The individual is generated from a historical society, but the historical society in turn, as long as it **takes** the individual creation **as** the medium, has an eternal life, [being part of] the world history. This is precisely what happens with biological life that lives, **taking** the cellular function **as** the medium” (*NKZ XII: 271*).

The philosopher is evidently searching for a point of balance between the state and the individual, trying to avoid a mere clash. The core of Nishida’s ideas on the relationship between the nation and the individual is, simply put, that the former *must* involve the latter, since, as said before, it is the source of creativity and a nation without creativity is pure oppression. In this process, the individual cannot be simply negated. These affirmations are directly linked to Nishida’s Logic of Place, which aims to include the true individual in the universal. Accordingly, he refuses partiality of both totalitarianism and individualism, being aware that Modernity is the scenario for the dialectical fight between the state and the individual. However, strictly following his logic, Nishida’s only sketched solution seems misplaced: why must a nation use the individual creation as the medium, if in Nishida’s logic the medium cannot be identified with *anything* in particular, but it must be Absolute Nothingness (See e.g. *NKZ XI: 382*)? Besides, the comparison with biology that appears in the quotation above is problematic, in the light of Nishida’s philosophical demand for individual irreducibility. In fact, it seems to imply that the philosopher adheres to the organicist theories of the nation as a living being, which uses individuals as tools for its own purposes, something straight in contrast with Nishida’s philosophical positions: if the individual were used as a tool, its self-determination would necessarily disappear.

Moreover, in the following Nishida considers the imperial household<sup>13</sup> as the guarantee of

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<sup>13</sup> According to Jacinto Zavala 1994: 143, Nishida considers the imperial throne as the founding

the correct relationship between the individual and the nation:

“I think that in the history of Our Country, totality was not opposed to the individual, nor the individual to totality, but in the mutual negation of the individual and totality, Our Country came to brightly develop itself, finding its own center in the Imperial Household (*kōshitsu* 皇室). Now and then, there were moments in which a totalitarian power came to be the center, but we always returned to the spirit of the Original Country (*chōkoku* 肇国) and, grounded on the Imperial Family, we went further, creating a new era” (*NKZ XII: 271-272*).

It is well known that Nishida faithfully supported the emperor. Hence, it is no surprise that he considered it as the guarantee for the individual against the danger of totalitarianism. Even if the importance given to the imperial household in the first Shōwa Japan does not represent a *direct* evidence of being chauvinist or militarist,<sup>14</sup> certainly the use of metaphors, which recall an immemorial, semi-mythical past to support a collective national identity, helps strengthening a sense of affinity with, if not correspondence to, nationalist propaganda of the time. However, Nishida is clearly looking for a defense to the individual. This passage tells us that he is trying to defend it not through a democratic division of powers, but through the hierarchical symbol *par excellence* of Modern Japan: the imperial household.

In the essay *Kokka riyū no mondai* (国家理由の問題 The Question of the State Reason, 1941; now in *NKZ X: 265-337*), written during the very same year of the lesson to the emperor, Nishida considers the problem of the theoretical foundation of the nation. This essay can be useful for our discourse because it displays some rudiments of a political approach to the individual, especially in its relationship with the state-nation (*kokka*).<sup>15</sup> In

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moment of the Japanese nation. Thanks to its self-negation, Japan's own identity overcomes the centuries. It is not a particular individual, or group of individuals, but it is a microcosm that mediates the macrocosm. Accordingly, the mythical and religious sense of his discourse is stressed more than the political and social dimensions. Therefore, the term *kōshitsu* in Nishida would be better translated as “Imperial Throne” than “Imperial Household”. However, to this probably correct textual remark it should be added that, even if in Nishida the term should be considered more cultural and religious than political, a Japanese reader of his times could but feel an intimate link with the political, nationalistic sense of the word. Therefore, I translate it as “Imperial Household”.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the support to the imperial family was very common in this period. Almost only Christians and Marxists were discordant. See e.g. Heisig 2001: 306.

<sup>15</sup> As is known, in Japanese, there is no clear distinction between the two words. In the Kyoto School discourse, the Modern conception of the nation is quite often projected to the past. This however occurs less in Nishida than in Tanabe.



this perspective, on one side, the nation is the rationalization of the society. In fact, it regulates human societies with laws and institutions. On the other side, however, it is not only rational: thanks to the influence of Leopold von Ranke's political conceptions, Nishida grants the nation a kind of individuality: it is a living individual and hence, it is historically irreducible (NKZ X: 310-311; 327). Accordingly, Nishida extensively applies his idea of the dialectical world which forms itself through the individuals to the political conception of the nation, considered not only as the self-determination of the historical world, but also one of its individual lives (*koseiteki seimei* 個性的生命) (NKZ X: 312-313). The nation is part of the process of individualization of the world: determining itself in the temporal dimension, the world engenders the nations. Expressing itself in the spatial aspect, it gives rise to the historical periods (*jidai* 時代) (NKZ X: 328).

The individual (*kojin* 個人) is closely bound to the nation, since the nation must be considered as the way of existence of the individual self. The individual can become "global" (*sekaiteki* 世界的), only if she or he is part of the nation (*kokkateki* 国家的), and not isolating her- or himself from it (NKZ X: 327). Morality too is closely connected to the nation: it does not originate from the interiority of the individual self, as with individualistic conceptions. On the contrary, it derives from a position in which the self is an "object of the nation, as a subject-*qua*-world" (*shutai soku sekai toshite no kokka no mono* 主体即世界としての国家の物) (NKZ X: 330). Morality does not abstractly derive from humanity, but it is the Oughtness (*tōi* 当為) of a nation's people and it is the self expression of the Absolute. In other words, it is unique, being a historical individual and it is bound to a particular time and some particular circumstances (NKZ X: 331).

At the end of the same essay, we find an interesting sketch of cultural history of the last three Modern periods. Accordingly, the Eighteenth Century should be considered as the age of the individual; the Nineteenth Century, as the epoch of nations and the consequent imperialism (*teikokushugi* 帝国主義) and finally the Twentieth Century, as the period of the World. In this period, the nations must not be oppositional (*tairitsuteki kokka* 対立的国家) anymore, but creative. Imperialism, founded as is on ethnical nations, belongs to the past (NKZ X: 337). What is most ambiguous however is that these quite enlightened statements follow four pages of (more or less theoretically ennobled) nationalist slogans,

which make Nishida's discourse very similar to the regime's propaganda. In these pages, he depicts the Japanese *kokutai* (国体)<sup>16</sup> with a religiously inspired tone, justifying the political conception of *saisei itchi* (祭政一致), or the "unity between religious and political power", and considering the Japanese Sovereignty (*shuken* 主權) as intimately bound to religion, namely to the imperial household (NKZ X: 333-334).

In this context, at best we must say that Nishida was so ingenuous to run the risk of using the opponent's words to affirm one's own thesis, in the effort to "redefine expressions created by the ultranationalists or used as slogans by militarists" as a way to "present an alternative to the nationalism of his days. As a philosopher he sought to give different, more reflective meaning to words and ideas that had been expropriated by the right." (Yusa 1994: 126). Still, his political words result all too dependent on the propagandistic words and metaphors of those years and his texts often end with being practically indistinguishable from the official propaganda.

In the light of these last considerations, we could ask if in our time Nishida's political pages about the individual may have a philosophical-political meaning. Because of many ambiguities in considering the political power of his times, it is highly doubtful that Nishida's political essays be *immediately* useful in contemporary debates. If we want to get our way through these pages, we must interpret his political ideas as if there were a (potentially) democratic content poured into nationalistic moulds. However, this is not a simple task, since his political vision often seems too embryonic to be something more than a more or less sophisticated slogan. This is exactly the case, for example, of his negative attitude about classical Eighteenth Century individualism, which is almost always rejected with generic reasons: we could probably say that the hidden reason is its partiality, but this is seldom clearly stated. Most common is the rejection of individualism because supposedly distant from the present intellectual *Zeitgeist* (See e.g. NKZ XII: 271; 393-394).

I do not think however that Nishida's philosophy is unable to inspire a mature political thinking. Simply it cannot be accomplished in Nishida's terms. Hence, a step back is needed to recover his fundamental intuitions, in order to reorganize an up-to-date political

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<sup>16</sup> As is known, this word has been variously translated as: "Essence of the Nation", "National Polity" or "Body of the Nation". It represented one of the most important key-terms of ultra-nationalistic propaganda of the regime in the first Shōwa period.

thought. Nishida does not accomplish this. On this regard, I can only agree with James Heisig who affirms that Nishida's political theories "are not significant either for the development of his ideas nor for the history of political philosophy as such" (Heisig 2001: 99). However, it cannot be excluded that more relevant results may emerge from a creative reprise of Nishida's ontology. Of course, accepting this view means to judge Nishida's political philosophy as a failure.

#### *4. Tanabe's Dialectics Between Species and Individual*

How is the individual considered in Tanabe's thinking? As already said, Tanabe's philosophy begins to diverge from Nishida's when the Logic of Place appears. In fact, Tanabe considers it as a kind of immediate union with the Absolute, that implies to decay into mysticism. Accusing Nishida of undervaluing the importance of the Middle Term in the logical relationship between universal (*ippansha* 一般者) and individual (*kobutsu*), Tanabe thinks it essential to face at the problem of the particular (*tokushu* 特殊), or species/specific (*shu* 種) which according to him is often a hindrance in this relationship. Tanabe's discourse has both a logical-theoretical and a practical-political side: on one hand, he thinks that the particular has been fundamentally neglected by the philosophers, and Nishida is by no means an exception. On the other, he inextricably binds this highly theoretical theme to the socio-political and ethical dimension of cultural and ethnical specificity. The main purpose of Tanabe's metaphysics is to find through logic an ethical ground for the individual action and a rational foundation for the nation. This effort concretizes in the Logic of Species (*shu no ronri* 種の論理) (See e.g. *THZ* VI: 449; 453). Hence, the problem of species becomes an essential reference to understand Tanabe's concept of individual.

According to Tanabe, in classical syllogism, the Middle Term is traditionally almost left unconsidered, even if it is thanks to it that the relationship between the universal and the individual is made possible. The medium is never considered as an autonomous existence, but always as a specification of the universal or a universalization of the individual. It is thought of as a simply self-negating moment, destined to be solved in the universal, or in

the individual. However, if the medium disappears, the distinction between universal and individual becomes problematic: the universal becomes merely a generalized individual, and the individual just a particularized universal. The only solution is to grant the particular an independent existence (see Kōsaka 1949: 99-100).

In Tanabe's philosophy, the three logical elements of syllogism – the universal, the particular, or species, and the individual – have a socio-political dimension as well. This aspect is particularly evident in the need to find a solution for the fight between the particular society and the individual. On one side, the particular has the power to conform the individual to itself, to the point of taking its life. It is the irrational immediacy (*chokusetsutai* 直接態) that negates logic. On the other, the individual acts against the species, trying to subjugate it. In this view, lightning of irrational forces sheds sinister shadows upon history: the Schopenhauerian “Will to Survive” (*seizon ishi* 生存意志) of the species crushes against the Nietzschean “Will to Power” (*kenryoku ishi* 權力意志) of the individual.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the individual is grounded on species, namely, it has no direct access to universal (rationality), but it is necessarily mediated by the species, which therefore exerts a very strong pressure on it. Under this menace, the individuals cannot take any practical or ethical decision. Because of such a situation, a method must be found to overcome this pressure due to the closed society, and rational foundations must be laid for the nation (*THZ* VI: 449; 453). Taking inspiration from Bergsonian philosophy, as well as from Tönnies' sociological studies,<sup>18</sup> Tanabe interprets Japan as a closed and totemic society, which needs to be opened. However, unlike Bergson, he does not think that the new moral order may be *immediately* created by the action of one single individual, though genius. On the contrary, a solution could be found only after a careful analysis of the logic

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<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding his use of the Nietzschean term, Tanabe lately will cut any relationship with the German philosopher and his “negative overcome” (*hitei chōkoku* 否定超克), considering the idea of Will to Power only in the moral and religious sense of “direct egotism” (*chokusetsu no gasei* 直接の我性), or egocentricity (*gashū* 我執) (*THZ* VI: 451).

<sup>18</sup> The reference is to Bergson's essay *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), where the French philosopher identifies two types of morality and religion: the first is stiffened in stereotypes and taboos; the other one is human and adaptable. The first is very common among human societies. The second is inspired by great personalities who sweep away all the usual habits and in their impulse they renew the moral and religious *status quo*. Tönnies inspires Tanabe with his distinction between the narrow communality (*Gemeinschaft*) and large society (*Gesellschaft*) (see *THZ* VI: 451).

inherent in such a closed society. This investigation would be important for the nation too, as far as it is dependent on society.

In restricted groups, Tanabe continues, the prevailing logic seems to be similar to Levy-Bruhl's pre-logic of participation (*bun'yū no zenronri* 分有の前論理), in which the individuals identify themselves with totem, lacking true personal consciousness. Far from being limited to primitive groups, this logic is at work also in more advanced societies. Or, more radically, the logic of participation exemplifies the irrational character of social existence. Tanabe's analysis is clearly very far from Tönnies', who conceives communality positively, as the place of ancestral values and familiar intimacy, and large society negatively, as a place dominated by impersonal and potentially hostile relationship. In Tanabe, the local/global distinction does not express the confrontation between the values of communality and the impersonal relationships of the large society anymore, but the conflict among two ultimately blind and irrational elements and the same reason of the individual is not an instrument of agreement, or criticism, but only a tool of domination. In fact, opposed to the "logic of participation" of the society, the individual (*kotai*) is free, autonomous. Tanabe says that the individual is what can choose non-existence (suicide), i.e. it is free to choose among existence and non-existence (see Kōsaka 1949: 107). The individual is free *from* species – i.e. it is a counter-determination against the Will to Life of the species – but at the same time it is free *toward* species – i.e. it adopts the "logic of severance" (*bunritsu no ronri* 分立の論理), which, although rational, it is used to subjugate and dominate the others, to exploit them as tools (see Kōsaka 1949: 108-109). It is dubious that, as with both Tönnies and Tanabe, the distinction between local and global social relationship may directly lead to a specific value judgment, since a restricted social relationship is not necessarily more (or less) rational and positive than a global one. However, the lack of a teleological cause in Tanabe's conception of history must be carefully taken into account: rejecting Hegelian providence in the historical process, as well as Marxist idea of immanent salvation, Tanabe's view of history excludes any transcendent Reason that may guide humanity to a better future. Only dialectical fight remains among society and individuals. The particular, being irrational, does not persuade the individual, which is rational and moral. At the same time, the individual is not able to transform the species with its morality. According to Tanabe, all the classical theories about the state fail

to deal with this unbearable oppression by society over the individual: contractualism, the I-Thou relationship and Hegelian Objective Spirit cannot ultimately explain the *irrational* character of human groups (see Kōsaka 1949: 93 ff.). How to overcome the *cul-de-sac* of this juxtaposition between society and the individual? Tanabe's solution to this clash of social forces is the "Logic of Absolute Mediation" (*zettai baikai no ronri* 絶対媒介の論理), otherwise said "Absolute Dialectics" (*zettai benshōhō* 絶対弁証法).

### 5. *The Logic of Absolute Mediation*

In order to understand this point, we must go back again to Tanabe's criticism to Nishida, accused of having created an emanationist system, (*THZ* VI: 467-469) in which the Absolute Nothingness, instead of really being Nothingness, is still Being, because it *directly* determines itself in things and it is not dialectical in itself: Nishida's Place of Absolute Nothingness is but a "positive, non-dialectical affirmation of dialectics" (*THZ* VI: 473; 478). Dialectics in itself is directly affirmed. Hence, it is not involved within dialectical relationship, becoming a Being, not a nothingness. In order to be really dialectical, true dialectics must negatively mediate Absolute Nothingness as well. In this way, everything, the Absolute too, is processual and relative. Hence, in syllogism, universal, particular and individual are all reciprocally mediating and mediated in turn. Each moment, mediation included, are reciprocally mediated, i.e. there is no absolute mediation in itself, but mediation is absolute just because the universal does not act immediately upon the relative, but only through the action of other relatives. In other words, this absolute dialectics is possible, conceiving Nothingness as an "activity of absolute negation" (*zettai hitei no sayō* 絶対否定の作用), being mediated by negation. Absolute Nothingness must be activity, not a transcendent existence. Nominally, this logic could represent a strong affirmation of the individual. Actually, in Tanabe's philosophy, this rather implies an affirmation of species and *de facto* of the nation.

Unlike Nishida, whose interest in politics did never reach the very core of his thought, Tanabe's logic is structurally linked to politics. In fact, according to the philosopher, the immediacy which negatively mediates this Absolute Nothingness is species, or the people (*minzoku* 民族). This particular substrate (*kitaiteki shu* 基体的種) is considered as the

moment of self-alienation (*jiko sogai* 自己疎外) of absolute mediation (the rational, the universal) and as such it is opposed to the individual, which is the moment in which the universal returns to itself (*jiko fukki* 自己復歸). This return to itself, being in turn the negation of self-alienation, is identical with absolute negation. Accordingly, staying-with-itself (*jika shijū* 自家止住, German: *Bei-sich-sein*) is at the same time going-outside-of-itself (*THZ* VI: 473-474).

To consider the Logic of Species as the self-negating moment of the Logic of Absolute Mediation clearly means that Tanabe aims to reintegrate species within thought, theoretically explaining its existence (*THZ* VI: 473-474). More radically, the Logic of Species represents the political side of the Logic of Absolute Mediation, whose fundamental principle – i.e. the intermediation among all factors – is maintained: the species mediates the universal for the individual and also the individual for the universal, while the individual mediates the universal for the species. The name “Logic of Species” comes from the species being central in this action of mediation among universal and individual. This same logic, if considered from the point of view of the individual, is called “Logic of Action” (*kōi no ronri* 行為の論理), since Absolute Nothingness (the universal) is realized through the individual subjective praxis. Tanabe himself recognizes an evolution in his conception of the individual within the Logic of Species:

“At that time, I was pessimistic about the strength of egoism, namely about the violence of the desire of honors and power that dominates us intellectuals, who nevertheless know and discuss about the squalor of egocentricity and especially about the value of the lack of ego, just the opposite of the thoughts we actually harbor; moreover, while I was worried with the foundation of my pessimism, which laid exactly in the difficulty to rid myself from my egoism, I spoke about the egoism of the individual, and discussed about its negative opposition to the social substrate. Consequently, at that time in my way of thinking at the individual I did not hitherto develop a dialectics according to which the True Self had to be recovered through [the action of] losing the self, namely, [a dialectics according to which] the True Self had to reach existence only with absolute negation; on the contrary, I was limited to [consider] the egoism of the direct individual self having to be negated dialectically. I can really but say that this [conception] can only be one-sided, and I considered society exclusively from the side of the limitation toward the individual. Accordingly, after a while I added a correction according to which the

individual, in order to become really individual, must be negated-*qua*-affirmed in absolute negation and the True Individual becomes individual for the first time within totality, being mediated by the universal” (*THZ VI*: 450-451).

This quotation indicates that the initial stimulus to build the Logic of Species for Tanabe was fundamentally ethical and religious and the individual (himself included) was at the center of his concern. The confrontational character of Tanabe’s thinking gradually fades in a more conciliatory conception of dialectics between individual, universal and species, which ends with a religious self-realization of the individual in the nation. The ambiguously religious nature of this process of self-discovering by the individual in the nation must also be remarked.

## 6. *The Nation and the Individual*

Tanabe considers the nation as the universalized species. It is a synthesis in which subjective individual and species negate each other. It has cultural and ethnic (*shuzoku* 種族) implications, being an entity unified by one language and one culture (*THZ VI*: 449), while at the same time it is the mediated form of the manifested universal. Without it, society would decay into a closed society. During the first formulations of the Logic, we can find quasi-democratic definitions of the nation:

“The nation on one side, **makes** the people’s specific substrate **as** one moment [of the process] and it expects a unification of the social community, while, on the other side, it acknowledges the initiative (*hatsui* 発意) of the individual, which negatively opposes to it, and its need of independence; [the nation] is a unification of negation-*qua*-affirmation which mediates the unification of the people with the individuals’ consensus of opinion (*shūgi kōron* 衆議公論)” (*THZ VI*: 231)

However, Kōsaka Masaaki opportunely remembers that there is an evolution in the Logic of Species on this aspect: in early essays such as *Shakai sonzai no ronri* ( 社会存在の論理, The Logic of Social Existence, 1934-35, now in *THZ VI*: 51-168), the Species is simply the negative moment, the immediate unification opposed to subjectivity; later on, in *Shu no*



*ronri o akiraka ni su* (種の論理を明らかにす An Explanation of the Logic of Species, 1937, now in *THZ* VI: 447-521) it becomes the principle of self-alienation, which further deepens the meaning of the negative within this logical structure. Finally, in essays such as *Kokkateki sonzai no ronri* (国家的存在の論理 The Logic of National Existence, 1939, now in *THZ* VII: 27-53), Tanabe's discourse becomes closer and closer to ultra nationalist propaganda, elevating the Nation to the center of the Logic of the Species (Kōsaka 1949: 111-112).

According to Tanabe, both species and the individual are negatively mediated, being universalized thanks to the “absolute mediativity” (*zettai baikaitai* 絶対媒介態) of the Absolute Nothingness, which is thought of as the activity of negative mediation, and which concretizes as the totality of negative-*qua*-positive unification between species and individual.

If species is the self-alienation of the medium, the individual too is a simple abstraction of this medium. How can the species get free from its self-alienation and the individual from its abstraction? The key of the process, according to Tanabe, resides in the individual action, through which the individual first subjugates the other and then, through this negation of the other, it negates itself, provided that its affirmation is only possible through the opposition to the other. When opposition disappears, the self negates itself too. The open society of the gender is then realized in this double negation:

“All the direct unifications are once negated by the separation of the individual consciousness and they are dissolved. Moreover, the I, which maintains only itself that dissolves only dissolving in that way; [the I] which rejects the other and usurps everything for itself; [this I] on the contrary becomes fully aware of its own finitude, in which it depends on its opposite, and, together with the negation of the Thou, it anxiously observes the extinction of the I; and the true I once dies in the Thou and at the same time the Thou dissolves when the opposing I disappears; both are reborn together in absolute unification, which overcomes both of them and for the first time, through this conversion, the unification of the absolute negation is actualized. This is the open society of the gender (*rui* 類).”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Kōsaka 1949: 117.

In the logic of Absolute Mediation, the individual is opposed to the species and negating it, it is negated in turn. In fact, the individual is “a subject that, instead of being only the extreme limit of the species’ scission, negates-*qua*-affirms species; through this mediation of the individual’s subjective praxis, [species] is negated-*qua*-affirmed in its direct irrationality and it is universalized” (THZ VI: 199). The content of the individual self-negation is existential: it becomes aware of its own contradiction, of its own nothingness, namely of its being totally dependent on species. The extreme limit of absolute mediation is the individual awareness of one’s own inner void and one’s being dependent on the other. Accordingly, the individual’s nothing is transformed into being, while it originally depends on the other and the Species’ being, which is self-sufficient, is transformed into nothing (see Kōsaka 1949: 117 ff.).

Echoes of the Hegelian conception of Objective Spirit can be heard in the idea of the state as a manifestation of the universal. It could probably be possible to interpret Tanabe’s position in the sense that he is advocating the moralizing effect of laws and institutions over closed society and that this effect can only be accomplished by single geniuses, whose moral and rational activity can carve the apparently immutable social *status quo*, a position similar to Bergson’s. However, things are not so simple. In fact, against this interpretation there are two main problems, which could be summarized in two words: logicism and religion.

These two aspects are structurally relevant within the Logic of Species and they cannot be separated without radically transforming the overall meaning of Tanabe’s philosophy.

Let us begin with indicating these elements in the conception of the individual. The negation of the other by the individual does not simply occur by individual’s means, but it takes origins outside of the dimension of rationality. It is not simply irrational, but trans-rational. In fact, through the individual rational mediation, Absolute Nothingness acts indirectly, and rationality becomes but one moment of the process: “My actions which depend on myself (*jirikiteki naru kōi* 自力的なる行為) are expression of the absolutely negative totality and, as far as this is concerned, they are expression of the Other-Power (*tariki* 他力)” (THZ VI: 222). In this quotation, Tanabe patently uses religious metaphors

coming from Japanese Amidist tradition,<sup>20</sup> quite a common habit of him. In fact, explaining the way through which a nation absorbs the individuals, Tanabe does not stress the importance of the objective side of the process, as with for example the nation's laws and institutions to regulate the closed society and hence guarantee a balance between the individual freedom and social needs (in other words: rights and duties). This position would probably be not impossible starting from his viewpoint. However, ultimately, he emphasizes the importance of the subjective dimension of the individual in the process, in a way that it is clearly more religious than political. In Tanabe's nation, the individual does not only limit its Will to Power, but it must *sacrifice itself* and in this very act it finds its own *self-realization*. Tanabe for example often uses the formula: "self sacrifice-qua-self realization" (*jiko gisei soku jiko jitsugen* 自己犠牲即自己実現) (See e.g. *THZ* VI: 452), whose religious characterization is beyond dispute.

Also the final synthesis of the nation – logically considered as the position of the gender in which both rationality (individual) and irrationality (particular) are mediated – has a deeply religious nature. In the gender, the individual loses itself and acquires the *True Self*, which in turn is welcome by the species, while this one is voided meanwhile. The gender is able to reconcile the species and the individual, through their mutual negation. The absolute negation of the gender works in two ways: through the action of the individual, which negates the species – while in so doing the same individual is negated – and through a manifestation (*ōgen* 応現) of the gender itself, which is however mediated by the relative, not representing the Absolute in itself. The nation (*kokka* 国家) is such a manifestation of the Absolute. The term *ōgen* is another example of Tanabe's mark of mingling together religion and politics. According to the thinker, it is the nation that, mediating the species and the individual, takes away (*aufheben*) their contradictions and makes them exist. In this way, the nation, thanks to its "Will to Salvation" (*kyūsai ishi* 救済意志) or "Will to Liberation" (*gedatsu ishi* 解脱意志) – other religiously connoted formulas – would concretize the individual and rationalize the species.

Tanabe's political vision of the nation too has a religiously inspired tone:

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<sup>20</sup> As is known, the opposition *jiriki/tariki* implies that the believer must discard her or his self-confidence in attaining salvation (*jiriki* or self-power), in order to open oneself to the action of the Absolute

“The gender **makes** the species **as** substrate and on the contrary, thanks to the reflection of the individual, it negates and breaks it down, and at the same time it is the unification of the Void (*kū* 空) in which the individual too is negated and the I loses itself. In this way, the opposition-separation of the individual is subsumed and the awareness of finitude on the contrary mediates the subsumption toward the gender and [the individuals] enter the Absolute Salvational Reception (*zettai sesshu* 絶対摂取) of Compassion (*jihī* 慈悲), in which, since “all sentient beings are sinners” (*issai shujō kai zainin* 一切衆生皆罪人), they practice mutual mercy and compassion. In such an Absolute Mediation, the Country formed by Bodhisattvas, who are individuals that live and die, once again affirms the ethnic species in its negation and transforms the control by the species into free *cooperation*. If we think that this is the essential function of the Nation, it should really be the realization of the gender and its concretization. If we consider that humanity is an open society of individuals, the nation, formed by individuals who can become members of humanity, is the Nation of Mankind (*jinruiteki kokka* 人類的国家), which is the gender’s existence”.<sup>21</sup>

This religious tone is not limited to rhetorical devices and images, but it affects the very definition of the nation: instead of being the guarantor of legal balance between society and the individual – a possible outcome, starting from Tanabe’s premises – the nation is religiously venerated. In fact, he tends to hypostatize the nation, conceding it the traditional metaphysical privileges once deserved to the religious objects of worship. He rationalizes, or better “immanentizes”, religious symbols and deities in order to use them for the sake of a kind of cult of the nation, which is thought of as the foundations of religion, to the point of affirming that not only “the Nation is the only absolute thing on this earth” (*THZ VI: 145*), but that there is the need “to free Christianity from myth and place the Nation instead of Christ. The Nation is the absolute manifestation of Buddha’s incarnation” (*THZ VII: 30-32*).<sup>22</sup>

The contamination of religion and politics affects the political couple of concepts limitation/freedom too:

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(*tariki* or Other-power), which is the only one that can save.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Kōsaka 1949: 118. Note that the term *sesshu* means the Buddha who receives and hence brings to salvation all the sentient beings.

<sup>22</sup> Himi 1990 gives a good indication of these problems from the point of view of religion.

“[...] What converts into affirmation of the absolutely negative subject the conflict between the specific substrate and the individual, which face each other negatively in this way, as the extreme of reciprocal negation of both, is the identification (*sōsoku* 相即) between the Nation which is the subjective totality and the individual. In this context, the conversion (*tenkan* 轉換) of the specific subject is realized and the organization of the totality-*qua*-individual (*zentai soku kotai* 全体即個体) is born. The Nation, as long as it depends on the principle of mediation synthesis in this sense, is a totality beyond the contract among individuals, and consequently it exerts coercion on them, and yet at the same time this coercion is immediately changed to freedom and the individual in this, while it is negate, is on the contrary affirmed and [the Nation] must be an organization in which the self-sacrifice-*qua*-self-realization takes place. Such an [organization] is a concrete structure of social existence which is a rational reality. It is something that is realized in the position of praxis which makes the negative union between the rational and the real exist; it is the incarnation of the dialectics of the active subject. Consequently, it must necessarily be rational. [...] If this is recognized, my viewpoint, which at first sight is but extremely nationalistic, is never the irrational totalitarianism of a simply direct nationalism (*minzokushugi* 民族主義), but it is a self-sacrifice-*qua*-self-realization and a limitation-*qua*-freedom and so I think that it is easily visible the fact that I try to build the Nation as the subjective self-realization of the totality, which depends on a spontaneous cooperation of all the members” (*THZ* VI: 452).

What does it mean to consider individual freedom (*jiyū* 自由) as dialectically related to its limitation (*kyōsei* 強制), as stated in this passage? I do not think that this doctrine has necessarily an anti-democratic outcome. In fact, it could be possible to interpret this fundamental idea as the regulation of freedom, essential to every democratic institution: through law, freedom for all members must be preserved. Hence, freedom cannot be absolute, if it must coexist with other freedoms. However, this is not the final result of Tanabe’s philosophy, which ends with the religious ideology of self-sacrifice and the exaltation of the nation, as the fulfillment of logical, necessary process.

In many respects, the Logic of Species seems abstract, especially if we confront the theoretical results of this logic with its preliminary hypothesis. First of all, even if the initial aim is admittedly to unmask the mechanism of Japanese closed society and eventually opening it, thanks to the influence of Bergson, in Tanabe this critical program is *de facto*

limited to its mere enunciation. Surprisingly enough, there is neither a critical analysis of Japanese society to denounce its problems, nor any discourse, which may formulate any proposal of reformation, or clarify the process to open society, except what is charged on the shoulders of the individual and its self-sacrifice.

Moreover, Tanabe does not exemplify the mechanisms of a closed society through concrete anthropological observations. Therefore, his critical effort is abstract and fragmentary: his research has nothing to do with sociological data or parameters. Only logical-philosophical approach is used to inquire this problem. Concrete references to Japanese society are almost absent and everything is confined to a logical and very abstract reasoning.

From the standpoint of logic, as already stated, Tanabe considers the nation as the mediated form of the gender, which is concretized in the specific ethnic and cultural community, and becomes a *Körperschaft*.<sup>23</sup> This abstract approach however causes an improper use of logical categories to describe social phenomena: the same identification of species with society and universal/gender with mankind/rationality ends with blurring logical and social properties and determinations. Hence, a social problem surreptitiously becomes a logical antinomy, since the very start of the Logic of Species: it is the very coexistence of both logical and practical patterns in the initial stimulus of the Logic of Species that is a strong logicist presupposition. Also the use of syllogism to describe society is a patent misuse of philosophical categories. As Karl Popper has explained in his *Poverty of Historicism*, the determinist temptation to find a logical formula to understand and predict history can lead to anti-democratic consequences. Similarly, interpreting historical events in terms of logical schemes can engender the risk of eternalizing and substantializing the historical factors, de-historicizing them. This goes exactly in the same direction of the Modernist strategies of absolutization of the nation, with which, willy-nilly, the Logic of Species mingles.

In his pages, no concrete obstacle to overcome, no process to be undergone is depicted, that may indicate a temporal or processual step. Moreover, the nation is regarded as the solution for the lack of freedom, which Tanabe quite arbitrarily thinks to be caused only by society. Consequently, one could wonder if Tanabe is really believing that all the unacceptable

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<sup>23</sup> See Kōsaka 1949: 123-124. Incidentally, it is worth noting that Tönnies uses the term *Genossenschaft* (community), while the use by Tanabe of the organicist term *Körperschaft* recalls the above mentioned word *kokutai* (see note 16).

limitations to individual freedom can only derive from species and not from the nation, or better that the nation cannot be unjust, and its limitations to individual freedom be necessarily positive. This would be a grotesque conclusion, considering the times in which the philosopher was living. However, if this is the case, it would probably be ascribed to Tanabe's logicist faith in the rationality of the real. In fact, notwithstanding his anti-hegelism,<sup>24</sup> he is firmly convinced of the Hegelian identity of the Real and the Ideal: if the nation is the actualization of the universal, it can only be fundamentally rational, or at least a kind of "the best possible nation". In fact: "For me, who cannot help believing (*shinzezaru o enai* 信ぜざるを得ない) in the rationality (*gōrisei* 合理性) of the Real, the very constraint of the nation's society can but be transformed into the autonomy of the reason" (*THZ VI*: 450).

How should we interpret this absolutization of the nation? Was it intentionally planned to philosophically strengthen the Japanese national identity? Can we interpret Tanabe's Logic of Species as a kind of failure to rigorously apply the Logic of Absolute Mediation, as James Heisig suggests? According to the critic, in fact, the philosopher seems to have not taken seriously some intuitions present in the idea of Absolute Dialectics (Heisig 1995: 288). In Tanabe, this logic is used as a conceptual reference point for a political theory that questionably interprets the nation as the religious manifestation (*ōgen*) of the Absolute.<sup>25</sup> The difference between this position of Tanabe and a blunt exaltation of the nation as the Absolute is really minimal. It is true that the Logic of Mediation could have a different conclusion: for example, instead of helping to strengthen the religious nature of the nation, it could have been used as a way of showing the impartial nature of the state, whose task would have been considered that of making laws (and making them respect), ensuring the democratic principles to be followed in everyday life. Hence, the religious and absolutist connotations seem all but appropriate.

According to Himi Kiyoshi, the failure of the Logic of Species, which eventually supports just the closed society it had to criticize, can be explained as the failure of a good intention,

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<sup>24</sup> The anti-Hegel tendencies of his philosophy are particularly evident in the work *Hegel's Philosophy and Dialectics*, (*Hēgeru tetsugaku to benshōhō* ヘーゲル哲学と弁証法, 1932), now in *THZ III*: 73-233.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that after the war, the nation, instead of *ōgen sonzai* (existence-manifestation), becomes *hōben sonzai* 方便存在 (existence-means). See also Himi 1990: 312 ff.

“a narrowing of consciousness that is not uncommon among the Japanese, pushing sound reason to one side and putting logic at the service of unquestioned bias” (Himi 1990: 311). As already stated, I think that this failure is due to the mixture of politics with logical and religious-existential factors. Accordingly, the nation and society becomes the religious place, in which the individuals sacrificing themselves would attain self-realization. But why did Tanabe mix these different dimensions? I suspect that Tanabe’s deification of the nation, although having clearly ideological effects, could be fundamentally religious and metaphysical in nature. If we consider the dark premises of his philosophical quests, we could read the *Logic of Species* as a way of religious self-realization in the times of Nihilism. In fact, what else could be the jungle-law-like fight between species and individual if not the social and practical effects of Nihilism? Tanabe seems to feel that in this era the conflicts between individualism and totalitarianism threaten to destroy humanity. Hence, he infers, the only possible salvation lies in the nation, which could reconcile the oppositions, thus avoiding reciprocal destruction. This could represent the solution to the clash of external impositions and internal egoism. In this context, the (modern) nation seems to acquire for Tanabe the status of religious salvation within Modern times, in which relativization of values and individualization of society on one hand, and the rise of totalitarian power, on the other, become more and more dangerous. His answer to this pessimistic analysis of our times is however more religious, moral and existential, than really political or sociological. The final result is a kind of “*ontotheology of the nation*”, which becomes the last absolute in which to believe, representing the only possibility of salvation, in the era of individualism and brutal oppression of totalitarianism. If this hypothesis is correct, it would explain the patent religious and logicistic character of Tanabe’s philosophy. From this point of view, Tanabe is anti-individualistic, in a way that Nishida is not. In fact, his negative attitude toward the individual is not only limited to politics, as with Nishida, but it is tightly intertwined with ontology as well.

However, Tanabe’s solution of taking refuge in the nation can only be considered as tragically and ironically wrong, since, during the Twentieth Century in general and in the first Shōwa Japan in particular, the nation has proved to be one of the best receptacles for the rise of totalitarianism, irrational ideologies and violent repressions of the individual’s fundamental freedom.



## 7. Conclusions

Summarizing Nishida's and Tanabe's similarities and differences in their conceptions of the individual, it could be said as follows. In Nishida's philosophy, the individual is certainly essential. He conceives it as an integrant part of the world, its main characteristic being *existence*, i.e. *the fact that it is in the world, as active part of the world*. This fundamental relationship includes conscience and consciousness. On the contrary, Tanabe seems to consider the individual as a fundamentally *moral and intellectual force*, in dialectical confrontation with species. Existence, instead of being what unites the universal and the individual, is fundamentally attributed to species, or better it is reciprocally mediated in the mirror game of Absolute Mediation. Consequently, the individual is problematic since the start. On the contrary, Nishida takes for granted the relationship between universal and individual: the relationship is dialectical, but immediate in its *being there*. This represents the real difference between Nishida and Tanabe, which affects their way of considering the individual and the nation: according to Nishida, both nations and individuals are products of the expressive self-individualization of the world. In Tanabe, they have an originally confrontational nature, which requires mediation. Moreover, in Tanabe the individual is mostly considered as ethical and critical, being opposed to the world. Consequently, this perspective results much more subjective, or at least anthropocentric, than Nishida's.

The relationship between nation and individual is somehow similar in Nishida and Tanabe: it is essential for both, while, however, in Tanabe it has a stronger religious character, representing the dimension in which the individual attains its moral and religious salvation. On the contrary, even if Nishida too uses religious images and concepts to depict this relationship, he clearly states that the nation has no soteriological value: "The nation – he writes – is the source of morality, but it cannot be said that it is the source of religion. [...] The nation does not save our souls" (NKZ XI: 463). This is due to the deep link between religion and existence, which characterizes Nishida's approach.

Actually, it may probably be said that there is a deep difference in the way of conceiving religion: in Nishida, it is an existential dimension, which acquires a cosmic resonance, in

that the individual is always intertwined with the world. In Tanabe, religion is connected to the moral and intellectual subject, which is originally opposed to the world and demands a social and political mediation. This difference in the way of feeling religion may have brought to different conclusions also in the relationship with politics.

Nevertheless, a deep link between religion and politics is present in both thinkers, with one remarkable difference: in Tanabe, the nation has religious nature. In Nishida, this religious feature is granted to the imperial household. This is not a subtle difference, because the imperial household is neither the executive, nor the legislative power. It is the symbol of the cultural and political identity of Modern Japan. This enables Nishida to describe it as the guarantee of the individual freedom, a task that Tanabe directly ascribes to the nation.

What is then the meaning of individual freedom in both thinkers? In Nishida, as already indicated, it is mainly *intellectual* freedom, while political and moral freedom are negated. In Tanabe, individual freedom is *de facto* negated, as far as it is assimilated within the religiously conciliatory dialectics of control-*qua*- freedom, self-sacrifice-*qua*-self-realization.

In conclusion, we can say that while both Nishida and Tanabe refuse the political and ethical implications of individualism, Nishida maintains a strong individualist orientation in metaphysics, while Tanabe seems to negate this orientation too, finding in the nation a religious-moral way to the individual's self-realization in the time of Nihilism.

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