The Inspiration of Nishida: A Look at the Spiritual Turmoil of Post-Restoration Japan
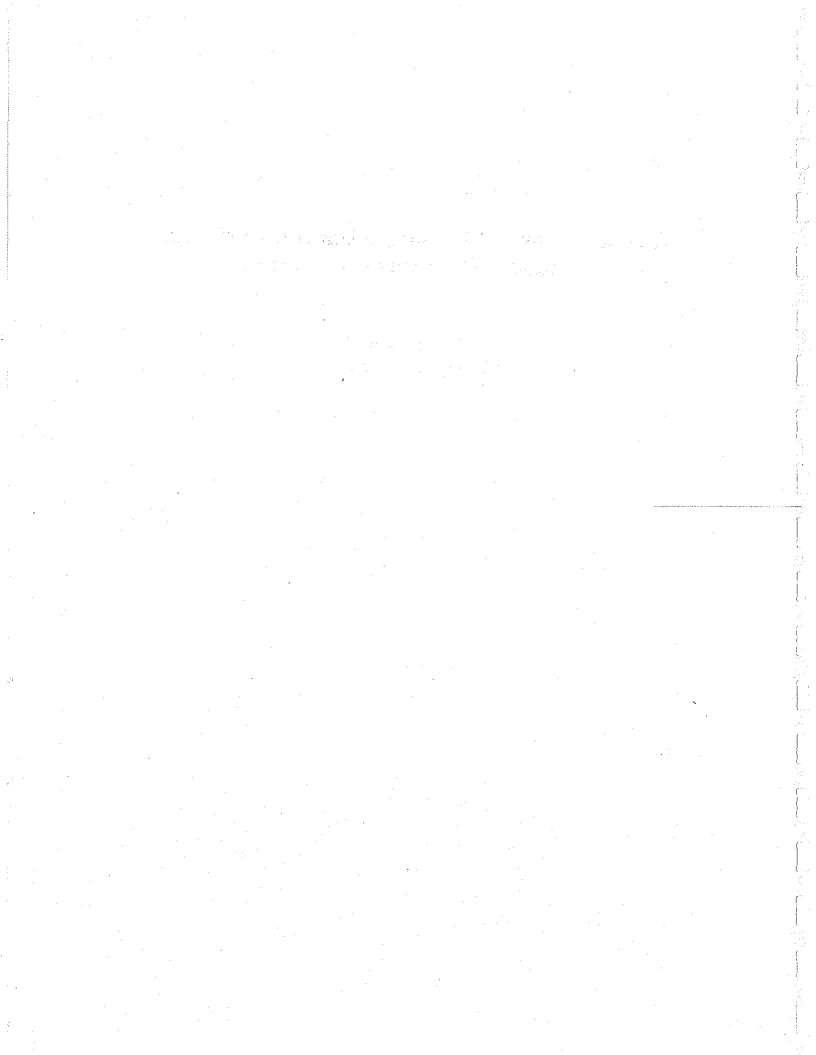
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INTRODUCTION

Over the years the Kyoto School philosophers and its founder Nishida Kitarō[1]

have been criticized for contributing to Japan's rising nationalism prior to and during the

Fifteen Year War.[2] Much has been said concerning this topic, and rightly so, considering

the weight of these accusations. What does it mean to share responsibility for the War?

Simply looking at the number of casualties the world suffered due to the War tells us that

the implications of these accusations are significant. Aside from the innumerable deaths

that came as a result of the various battles, the number of civilian casualties from the

Japanese aggressions and the two atom bombs were also staggering. For a branch of

philosophy that includes discussion of morality, being accused of collaborating towards

these deaths is no small charge.

What naturally follows this implication is the question of the validity of Nishida

and the Kyoto School's philosophy. Surely a philosophy that supports the fascist regime

of Imperial Japan cannot be one that can be applicable as we wrestle with questions

concerning morality, human existence and God. A guilty charge to the above accusations

would imply significant, and perhaps irreparable holes in the Kyoto School philosophy.

After all, what is the practicality of a moral, existential philosophy if it casts a blind eye

towards millions of deaths?

As one can see, the implications of the accusations are dire and deserve the

utmost attention. This paper will focus on Nishida in particular, looking at his

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[1] In this essay, I will use the traditional Japanese system of placing the family name first and given name last when mentioning Japanese names. For example, in this case Nishida is the family name while Kitarō is the given name.
[2] The Fifteen Year War refers to Japan's war in Asia including the Pacific War starting with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 to Japan's surrender in 1945.

nationalism and perspective towards the war effort of Imperial Japan. Scholarship up

until this point seem to agree that Nishida was in fact nationalistic in that he viewed his

homeland as the place where Eastern and Western civilizations could encounter each

other.[3] At the same time, many also seem to agree that Nishida in particular was opposed

to the Japanese government ruled by the military. In fact information available to us

through his diaries and letters suggest that he was severely depressed due to Japan's role

in the international arena.[4]

It must be noted here that in determining the implications of one's philosophy the

primary text is the most important source. However, it must also be noted that an account

of the actions of the philosopher can also be helpful in determining the correct

interpretation of the primary source. In this case, Nishida's diaries and such prove to be

useful in avoiding misuse of his political philosophy.

What, then, was the difference between the nationalism of Nishida and that of the

militaristic government? To answer this question, I believe it is important to study the

history of Japan's place in the world prior to the outbreak of the Fifteen Year War, that is,

the events surrounding the Meiji Restoration. Following Matthew Commodore Perry's

forceful opening of Japan's ports, the country found itself faced with the realities of the

world around it for the first time since the days of the third Tokugawa shōgun Iemitsu, a

time lapse of over two hundred years.[5] Being surrounded by numerous colonizing

powers of the West, Japan was in a position of being subjugated like its neighbor China.

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[3] Andrew Feenberg, "Modernity in the Philosophy of Nishida," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 154.

[4] Shizuteru Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 90.

[5] Susumu Ishii et al., *Nihonshi* (Tokyo: Yamagawa Shuppansha, 1996), 177.

I would like to argue that nationalism in Japan played a significant role in maintaining the country's autonomy and sovereignty. Without the strong sense of nationalism that existed in Japan during the mid to late 1800s, it is quite likely that it would have found itself as a colony of a Western power. In this sense, the nationalism that enveloped Japan at the time was a positive phenomenon. Of course the communal egotism of the militaristic government that viewed the Japanese people as superior to their Asian counterparts must be viewed as a form of nationalism as well. What I am proposing is that in this discussion of the Kyoto School, the Fifteen Year War and their connection to nationalism, there needs to be a more clear definition of what we mean by the latter term.

From the discussion that will follow, it will become evident that the nationalism that Nishida displayed throughout his career was indeed a thoughtful, peaceful one that contemplated the role Japan was to play in the encounter between the East and the West. On the other side of the spectrum is the nationalism displayed by the military of Japan that can perhaps be more accurately called militarism, imperialism or fascism. In order to fairly evaluate Nishida's degree of responsibility towards the war and his philosophy's validity today, this critical examination of the word "nationalism" is in order.

The first chapter of the thesis will discuss Japan's history from the arrival of Perry in 1853 to the end of the Fifteen Year War in 1945. From the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Japan had grown from an isolated, feudalistic country to an economic and military superpower. As Ueda Shizuteru notes in his essay "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," "But for a non-Western country, the acquisition of such power in so short a time could only come at the price of a rupture

whose social, cultural, and spiritual effects were bound to be traumatic."[6] As this quote indicates, Japan went through significant turmoil in all facets of life as it struggled to forge a balance between its traditional values and the need to modernize.

The second chapter will look at how Nishida's philosophy, starting with *An Inquiry into the Good*, answered the spiritual turmoil of the time. Faced with the rationalism of Western philosophy, many young intellectuals found themselves hopelessly detached from the traditional Japanese spirituality. Nishida answered the challenge of the West, writing a critique of Immanuel Kant's division between the noumenal sphere and the phenomenal. By using the traditional Eastern way of thinking influenced by Buddhism, Nishida legitimized Eastern thought, and made his mark as a formidable thinker in the East. Although Nishida adopted the Western format of philosophical discourse, he remained faithful to Eastern thought, and this fidelity contributed to Japan's spiritual self-esteem.

The third chapter will review some of his more controversial essays and speeches concerning Japan's place in the international community. These texts come from a critical time in Japan's role in the Fifteen Year War, and as we will see, work to criticize this war. Nishida's private letters and journal entries will also be reviewed in order to get a more personal view of his attitude towards the policy of the military regime. By examining these texts first hand and also bringing in the assistance of secondary sources, we will be able to flush out Nishida's real agenda in his contribution to the voices of the era. From this discussion we will be able to separate between Nishida's nationalism, which viewed Japanese thought as an entity that could contribute peacefully and

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[6] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 79.

positively to the increasing global interdependence, from the fascism of the military that attempted to force the Japanese spirit upon the world.

The fourth chapter will conclude the thesis with a few comments. The validity of Nishida's philosophy in the context of the Fifteen Year War will be reaffirmed. In addition to this, I will refute James Heisig's statement in his *Philosophers of Nothingness* that Nishida's political philosophy was a distraction from his fundamental inspiration.[7] As Nishida's academic career is closely examined, it will become clear what his "fundamental inspiration" was, namely creating a fruitful encounter of Eastern thought with modern Western philosophy.

Admittedly, Nishida's philosophy intended toward immediate political practicality came late in his career and was therefore far from complete. However, it does give us a valid starting point in a conversation about a nation's, in particular Japan's, attitude towards an increasingly interdependent world. As discussions about globalization dominate all fields of academia, Nishida's contributions are far from irrelevant. Furthermore, it gives us the opportunity to examine what role religious discourse should play in the political realities of the world.

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[7] James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 99.

CHAPTER 1: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JAPAN'S INTERACTION WITH THE WORLD AFTER 1853

This chapter will work to give a historical background of Japan's relations with the West. This information will give us a general perspective of the historical context in which Nishida developed his philosophy. In terms of examining Nishida's work, I believe it is useful to divide the history between 1853 to 1945 into two segments, with the publication of Nishida's first book, *An Inquiry into the Good* in 1911, as the divider. Both *An Inquiry into the Good* and is later works address different kinds of spiritual turmoil in Japan.

Between the years 1600 and 1853, Japan experienced relative peace under the feudal government established by the Tokugawa family after years of civil war. As mentioned in the introduction, the Tokugawa family enforced a policy of closed borders to the outside world. This in effect prevented the entry of outside influences that questioned their authority, namely Christian missionaries.[8]

The arrival of Matthew Commodore Perry in Uraga in 1853 broke the silence that had lasted over two hundred years. By the following year, Perry's seven naval ships lined with a number of canons unprecedented in Japan proved to be intimidating to the Tokugawa government. The two nations signed a treaty allowing the United States to use Japanese ports, mainly for their whaling expeditions in the area. Soon afterwards

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[8] Ishii et al., *Nihonshi*, 176.

England, Russia and the Netherlands followed suit, effectively ending Japan's isolation of two centuries.[9]

Again in 1858, Japan was faced with another agreement with the United States, this time concerning trade policies. The trade agreement included the opening of major ports, the agreement not to impose any tariffs on imports from the United States, making land available for American residents, the removal of Japan's rights to establish its own tax laws in relation to trade and extraterritoriality rights to the American expatriates.[10] The latter refers to the practice that Japanese laws do not apply to the American expatriates, an agreement that seriously threatened the sovereignty of Japan as a nation.

Many in Japan at the time saw the Tokugawa government's foreign policy as insufficient, and tensions began to rise. To many, the West was a force of barbarianism that threatened the purity of Japan. The ability of the Tokugawa government to successfully lead through the crisis was seriously questioned, and many began to vie for a restoration of the Emperor to power. Until that point, the Emperor had only acted as a figurehead, giving the power to govern and protect the Imperial court to the warrior family Tokugawa. In 1867, the two leading opponents of the Tokugawa family, Satsuma and Chōshū united and officially advocated the restoration of the Emperor to power. Eventually the Tokugawa family returned the right to rule to the Throne, ending over 250 years of rule. In 1868, the year known as the Meiji Restoration, after the name of the then Emperor Meiji, the right to rule was restored to the Throne, sparking the beginning of Japan's modern age. Two years later in 1870, Nishida was born in the Ishikawa prefecture.

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[9] Ishii et al., *Nihonshi*, 228.
[10] Ishii et al., *Nihonshi*, 229.

The transfer of power did not mean that the threat of the West had disappeared. Japan took the initiative to Westernize in order to catch up to the West under the motto of "Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Military."[11] In a period known as "Bunmei-kaika" or "the opening of culture," Japan sent students and scholars to various cultural centers of the world to observe and return with information that could be helpful to the advancement of Japan.[12] One such person was Fukuzawa Yukichi who, upon returning, drastically revolutionized the educational format of Japan. Fukuzawa, now known as a national hero, became a strong advocate of the Westernization of Japan, subscribing to the belief that Japan could perfect the incomplete innovations of the West.

Of course there was also opposition to the Westernization of Japan. Many of the samurai warrior class of pre-Restoration Japan were especially disgruntled because the equality-based policy of the new government stripped them of the power they formerly enjoyed. This sentiment eventually led to the Seinan War of 1877 between the new government and the forces led by Saigō Takamori of Satsuma.[13] Ironically, it was Saigō who had led the overthrowing of the former Tokugawa government in restoring the Emperor to power. Saigō's troops were eventually defeated, effectively ending the era of the samurai warrior in Japan.

The conflict between Westernization and tradition also occurred at the intellectual and spiritual level as well, a phenomenon that will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. For now it will suffice to say that many in Japan found their traditional beliefs being challenged by the rationalism of the Enlightenment philosophy of the West. What resulted was a spiritual, existential crisis for many young intellectuals

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[11] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 79.
[12] Ishii et al., *Nihonshi*, 245.
[13] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 79.

in Japan. It was Nishida's publication of *An Inquiry into the Good* in 1911 that addressed

this problem, giving a new rise in the Japanese way of interpreting Western philosophy.[14]

Through innovation and sacrifice, Japan continued to grow according to its motto,

which eventually led to the defeat of Russian forces in 1905. This victory increased the

nationalistic sentiment in Japan, and at the same time earned the respect of many Asian

countries around it. Although it was a common occurrence that a Western power

colonized an Asian country, an Eastern defeat of a Western power was unprecedented.

Between this time and the 1931 invasion of Manchuria, Japan's nationalism grew at a

rapid rate, as did its economic and military strength, making many of its Asian neighbors

uncomfortable. At the same time, many nations were proud of Japan's defeat of the

Russians. This confused sentiment can be seen in the following portion of China's Sun

Yat-sen:

> Thirty years ago there was not a single fully independent nation in our Asian
>
> continent....But, when Asia reached the nadir of its weakness, there came a
>
> turning point; and that turning point is the starting point of Asia's
>
> resurgence....Where do I situate that starting point? I see it in Japan....You, the
>
> Japanese nation, possess the essence of the kingly way of Asia but have already
>
> set a foot on the dominating way of America and the West. Before the tribunal of
>
> world culture, you, the Japanese nation, will have to make a serious choice
>
> whether from now on to become an agent of the Western dominating way or a
>
> bulwark of the Eastern kingly way.[15]

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[14] Robert W. Adams, "To Unite a World of Difference: Nishida Kitaro, Japan, and European Critical Philosophy in the Early Twentieth Century," in *NPA Journal of Pacific Asia*, available from http://law.rikkyo.ac.jp/npa/jpa.htm; INTERNET.

[15] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 80-81.

This speech came in 1924, and with the 1931 invasion of Manchuria on the horizon, it takes on an ominously foreshadowing tone. Between 1868 and 1931, the Japanese nationalistic sentiment evolved from one of survival from the Western imperialistic powers to one of imperialism itself.

The history from this point on is relatively well known so I will just touch on a few important points. Japan continued to spread its imperialist forces throughout Asia, bringing much of the Pacific under its power. The oil embargo that was enforced on Japan as a result of its aggression eventually led to the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. The war continued until Japan's eventual surrender in 1945, the same year of Nishida's death. Unfortunately for Nishida, the war outlived him by a few months.

During the war years, the military-controlled government took drastic measures in controlling the education and media of the public. The specifics of these measures will be covered in the third chapter, as it relates directly to the writings of Nishida of the time. For now it will suffice to say that Nishida began to take on some more political topics in his writings, again in response to how he conceptualized Japan's interaction with the international community.

CHAPTER 2: *AN INQUIRY INTO THE GOOD*

AND THE ENCOUNTER OF THE WEST

JAPAN'S SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL CRISIS AFTER THE RESTORATION

Nishida's first contribution to Japan's spiritual crisis came in 1911 with the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good*. It is important to look at this work because it also marks the beginning of Nishida's encounter with the West in his publications. In it, he does not literally spell out to his readers the legitimacy of Eastern thought. However, by using Eastern ideas in his critique of Western philosophy, he covertly makes a case for the former. As I will try to prove throughout this thesis, it was the beginning of the manifestations of one of his fundamental inspirations for his philosophy: the fruitful encounter of Eastern thought with Western philosophy.

As it was mentioned, with the Meiji Restoration came the need to economically and militarily catch up to the West. However, the technological innovations and economic theories were not the only ideas to enter the now open borders of Japan. The Enlightenment ideals that drastically changed Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries proved to be a large influence for change in Japan as well. Robert Bellah, in his essay "The Religious Situation in the Far East," puts the dilemma eloquently into words: "The modern situation did not arise out of the East Asian past, either as natural growth or as pathological aberration; rather, it came from without. It came often sharply, even brutally, and it had no roots in the past."[16]

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[16] Robert N. Bellah, "The Religious Situation in the Far East," in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 101.

As Bellah points out, the ideas that entered the borders after over two hundred years of *sakoku*, or the closed-borders policy, were completely foreign to Japan's tradition-based social structure. The breakout of the Seinan War over samurai rights indicates a strong adherence to the traditional Confucian system of hierarchy. At the same time, scholars such as Fukuzawa Yukichi worked hard to bring Enlightenment ideals to the Japanese public, hoping to influence them and in so doing, improving the nation. For example, Fukuzawa believed that every Japanese should, "establish his own independence, and then Japan would be independent," a paraphrase of a more general statement by J.S. Mill, and a clear contradiction to the collectivist, hierarchical system of traditional Japan.[17] Further, Fukuzawa criticizes the traditional ways of thinking, saying:

> If we compare the knowledge of the Japanese and Westerners, in letters, in techniques, in commerce, or in industry, from the smallest to the largest matter...there is not one thing in which we excel....Who would compare our carts with their locomotives, or our swords with their pistols? We speak of the yin and yang and the five elements; they have discovered sixty elements....We think we dwell on an immovable plain; they know that the earth is round and moves. We think that our country is the most sacred divine land; they travel about the world, opening lands and establishing countries....In Japan's present condition there is nothing in which we may take pride vis-à-vis the West. All that Japan has to be proud of...is its scenery.[18]

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[17] Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Japan's Turn to the West" in *Modern Japanese Thought*, ed. and trans. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 85.
[18] Kenneth B. Pyle, "Meiji Conservatism" in *Modern Japanese Thought*, ed. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101.

As was mentioned in the last chapter, Fukuzawa became a well-respected intellectual, and his beliefs spread throughout Japan. The appearance of his face on the ten thousand yen bill in Japan today is a proof of his profound influence on the nation.

Although there was a definite tension between traditional and Enlightenment ideals, the new, Western ideas proved to be exciting and inspirational to many young intellectuals.[19] As a nation, Japan incorporated the ideas to its advantage, which culminated in the defeat of Russia in 1905, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. Japan had indeed established itself as a superpower through its motto of "Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Military."

But as Bellah's statement quoted earlier in this chapter and Ueda's in the introduction imply, this gain in prominence did not come without a price. Despite Fukuzawa's assertion that Japanese knowledge was far inferior to the West's, many started feeling existentially disenfranchised. While Western philosophy boosted Japan's economic power, it also threatened to disprove many of the traditional beliefs that had existed for many centuries. Unfortunately, some could not handle the existential crisis that came as a result of such a conflict. In 1904, Fujimura Misao, an eighteen-year-old student, committed what has been called *tetsugakuteki jisatsu*, or philosophical suicide, after completing an essay entitled, "The Feeling of Being Atop a Precipice." An excerpt of the essay reads as follows:

> How boundless are the heaven and earth! How remote the past is! Yet with this small body of five feet I try to fathom their great expanse. In the end, how can Horatio's philosophy have any authority? The truth of everything speaks to me

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[19] Hirakawa, "Japan's Turn to the West," 84.

one simple phrase and then falls silent; it says, "One cannot understand"

(*fukakai*).[20]

Fujimura refuses to believe that an insignificant creature like himself could ever

come to know the mysteries of the world, and is disgusted at what he sees as egotistical

attempts by Western philosophy to uncover them. After writing the note, Fujimura threw

his body into a waterfall, and his suicide caused the intellectuals of the time to examine

the encounter of Japan with the West.

Shocks were being felt throughout Japan in many other forms as well. In an

account of an early Japanese Protestant Christian, Niijima Jo, cited by Bellah, we can see

the crumbling of the Confucian social structure. After reading about Christ's crucifixion,

Niijima comes to realize that it was God, not his parents that had created him.[21] This

realization had in effect shifted his center of obligation from his parents to the Christian

God.

This sort of change became common enough around Japan that it caused a stir of

uncertainty around the nation. The familiar structure of values was visibly being

threatened in many ways, a phenomenon that would be confusing to people any where in

the world.

IMMANUEL KANT AND *AN INQUIRY INTO THE GOOD*

The above are but a sample of instances where the spiritual crisis in Japan was

evident, and it was in this context that *An Inquiry into the Good* came to be published. In

it, Nishida confronts the problem of the individual's experience through a critique of

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[20] Adams, "To Unite a World of Difference."
[21] Bellah, "The Religious Situation in the Far East," 104.

Western philosophy, mainly Immanuel Kant, using ideas based on Eastern traditions.
Considering Fukuzawa's comments concerning the inferiority of Japanese thought in
comparison to that of the West, Nishida's attempt was a bold one, and is regarded as the
starting point of the Kyoto School philosophy. In order to examine Nishida's methods of
encountering the West, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at his first book.

Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy was one of the most influential to come out
of the Enlightenment. Although his philosophy was wide in scope, the element central to
discussion in this paper is his distinction between the noumena and the phenomena, as
discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[22] Kant argues that in order to have a critical
philosophy, one must concentrate on the phenomena, or that which can be understood
using our cognitive faculties. The noumena, or things as they are in themselves, cannot
be perceived through cognitive faculties and thus should not be used in scientific inquiry.
Using this division as a basis, Kant discourses on the role of religion using only the
phenomena in his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

Although Kant's distinction was a breakthrough in many ways, it also posed
several problems for religion. Because God is a being in itself, and therefore could not be
perceived, Kant necessarily had to describe the concept of God as merely a postulate.
This spawned many criticisms, including Feuerbach's charge that God was nothing more
than an anthropomorphic concept used as a projection of human ideals. Another concept
that was heavily criticized was that of the moral law, which Kant argued was universal,
and discernable through reason. Kant did not account for the historical nature of reason
in his concept of the moral law, and thus was open to critics such as Nietzsche who

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[22] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990), 156.

argued that Kant's laws were outdated. According to Nietzsche, any moral law

connected to Christian ideals were egalitarian in nature, and therefore a hindrance to

human's strive for greatness through the will to power.[23]

The effects of Kant's critical philosophy also reached the shores of Japan. As

described earlier, the rationalism of the Enlightenment, a movement that Kant was

undoubtedly a part of, threw the nation into a state of spiritual and social turmoil. The

chaos was indeed warranted, since it threatened to disprove many aspects of Japanese

culture that held significance in the lives of the Japanese.

Following Kant's work, many attempts were made to bring the noumena back

into the realm of discussion of religion. One such example is Friedrich Schleiermacher's

On Religion where he describes religion to be an "intuition of the universe" where the

individual is some how united with universe through a feeling.[24] As opposed to

Schleiermacher's idea that intuition, not systemic thinking, is the way that people can

experience the divine. Nishida argues that intuition and thinking are, at the root, the same

kind of activity.[25] Instead of two separate ways of experience, he sees them both as

activities of the conscious. However, Nishida values intuition more than any other form

of consciousness. He states that "intuition is a direct judgment, and for this reason I

stated before that intuition is the starting point of knowledge that is free from arbitrary

assumptions."[26]

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[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H. L. Mencken (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1920), 51.
[24] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.
[25] Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 41.
[26] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 41.

He further argues that what is often regarded as objective thinking, such as scientific inquiry, is not objective at all. Because any kind of activity of the consciousness aside from intuition, or direct judgment, is attached to personal assumptions, they necessarily cannot be objective. Concerning this, Nishida says "However much we talk about the objective world as the subject matter of pure knowledge, it cannot escape its relation to our feelings."[27] This statement directly challenges Kant's claim in having developed a critical philosophy by concentrating on the phenomena. Nishida insists that it is the direct judgment, not Kant's assumption-marred thinking, that reveals the real truth. Nishida directly disputes Kant's claim to critical thought by saying, "Even such great philosophers as Locke and Kant fail to escape the contradiction between these two kinds of thinking. I intend to abandon all hypothetical thought and to engage in what I call critical thought."[28]

Nishida calls the action of direct judgment "pure experience" and uses this concept to reject the distinction between the noumena and the phenomena. According to Nishida, at the point of pure experience, "our thinking, feeling, and willing are still undivided; there is a single activity, with no opposition between subject and object."[29] Because there are no individual assumptions to distort the judgment, the experience is of the thing-in-itself. Also, precisely because there are no distortions in the experience, it is pure objectivity. For Nishida, in order for one to be truly objective, one must discard the subjective self from which all assumptions arise, and essentially unite with the objective nature. He further states, "Thousands of years after their deaths, Sākyamuni and Christ still have the power to move people only because their spirit was truly objective. Those

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[27] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 49.
[28] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 43.
[29] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 48.

without a self—those who have extinguished the self—are the greatest."[30] Nishida

concludes that the only true reality is this objectivity reached through pure experience.

It is important to note here that through this discussion arises one of the

fundamental problems of Nishida's philosophy. Where do these assumptions that blind

us from a greater reality come from? Why are humans born with this fundamental

illusion? This problem can be compared to the concept of original sin in Christianity,

which has given rise to much debate. Nishida does not address this problem in *An*

Inquiry into the Good, but the problem is critical enough that, without an answer, the

philosophy remains incomplete.

The concept of true objectivity sets the groundwork for Nishida's discussion of

God. From the standpoint of pure experience, which is the only true objective standpoint,

there is only one true reality in this universe because there are no subjective distinctions.

According to Nishida, it is reality itself, that which has no distinction between

subjectivity and objectivity, that is God.[31] Because God *is* reality, we can experience him

through pure experience. By explaining the reality of God in this way, Nishida

successfully avoids postulating the concept of God. He states, "If we seek God in the

facts of the external world, God must inescapably be a hypothetical God."[32] According

to Nishida's philosophy, God is neither a hypothetical or anthropomorphic entity, which

were two major critiques posed by the skeptics of the 19th Century. In this concept of

God, Nishida is again very much like Schleiermacher who proposed that God can be

experienced through intuition. Nishida states that the ancient religions of India and the

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[30] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 77. This comment concerning Christ would be problematic to orthodox Christians, since it implies that it is possible that His greatness is achievable for others as well. Although Nishida does not directly state it, it may be interpreted as Christ's achievement of Buddhahood.
[31] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 79.
[32] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 81.

15th and 16th century European mystics who "sought God in intuition realized in the inner soul" had the greatest knowledge of God.[33]

Nishida's avoidance of postulating the existence of God was a significant accomplishment that many philosophers struggled with during the 19th Century. Despite his closeness to Nishida in several aspects, Schleiermacher was not able to overcome this problem with his "intuition of the universe." Søren Kierkegaard, who perhaps shares more in common with Nishida than Schleiermacher, also struggled with the problem, stating his frustrations with it in his *Philosophical Fragments*. He states that one may mistake one's own fantasy for an understanding of the unknown when all along "it itself has produced the god."[34] Indeed, the postulation of God inevitably sets the entirety of a theistic philosophy on a base of uncertainty. Thus it is open to criticism and skepticism of science and agnosticism, both of which would charge this as unreasonable.

Later in the book, Nishida proposes that God is absolute nothingness.[35] He goes on to say that God is not mere nothingness, but is the base of reality because he is no-thing. Since God is the essence of all things in the universe without distinction, God must be no-thing. As a result, Nishida states, "there is no place where God is not, and no place where God does not function."[36]

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[33] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 81.

[34] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 45.

[35] It is interesting to note here that Nishida uses the term *mu* in the original Japanese text, which has been translated as "nothingness" by translators Masao Abe and Christopher Ives. The Buddhist term *sūnyata* is often translated into English as "emptiness," but is used interchangeably with *mu*. Keiji Nishitani, a philosopher who followed in Nishida's steps used the term *ku* to describe the same thing, and has been translated as *sūnyata* by translator Jan Van Bragt. The reason for the diverse use of terms is probably only preference, although it is interesting that Nishida never mentions Zen in *An Inquiry into the Good*, which was without a doubt a great influence in his philosophy.

[36] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 82.

Nishida comments that his idea of God may warrant him the label of being a pantheist, a label that many theologians would be uncomfortable having. However, Nishida defends the concept of pantheism, arguing that theism is just as guilty of the charges that pantheism is accused of. According to Nishida, the common critique of pantheism is the fact that it threatens the personality of God because it makes it identical to nature. Nishida argues that as long as we view the foundations of reality as spiritual, this does not necessarily happen.[37] He further argues that, "no form of pantheism holds that individual things are God just as they are."[38] Nishida then criticizes forms of theism for putting God outside of reality, which distanced God from humanity.

Although there were both positive and negative reactions to Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good*, its accomplishments were felt throughout Japan. A young student, Kurata Hyakuzō, who later became a prominent philosopher, commented:

> The idea that experience is more fundamental than the determination of individuality does away with the solipsistic ego! And, even better, it has been done so peacefully...his phrases shown with bright strength in my eyes. I felt as if my heart had stopped. I wasn't filled with joy, and I wasn't sad. Instead, I felt a kind of quiet tension and then, for some reason, I was unable to read any more. I closed the book and sat motionless in front of my desk. Without my being aware of it, tears began to roll down my cheeks.[39]

Whether or not the critics were in agreement with Nishida, perhaps his greatest accomplishment was the fact that he proved that the Japanese were capable of developing a viable criticism of prominent philosophers such as Kant. With his compelling

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[37] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 155.
[38] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 155.
[39] Adams, "To Unite a World of Difference."

arguments, he demonstrated that the Eastern way of thinking was not inferior to the West, and in fact could be used to critique the latter.

CHAPTER 3: NISHIDA'S SECOND CHALLENGE

THE GROWING MILITARISM

The Westernization of Japan marked the first spiritual crisis of the nation after the

Meiji Restoration. The climax of the realization of the motto "Enrich the Nation,

Strengthen the Military" brought the second crisis during the lifetime of Nishida. The

role of Japan in the international arena came into question once again. After the defeat of

Russia, Japan's national spirit continued to rise, and as the quote by Sun Yat-sen that was

quoted earlier suggests, the way that Japan saw itself in the world began to change.

Despite the warnings, Japan chose the way of the "dominator" behind the mask of the

"kingly way," following the imperialistic policy much like the West they criticized. This

chapter will examine the relationship between the nationalism of the fascist government

with that of Nishida.

Although the beginning of the Fifteen Year War with the invasion of Manchuria

in 1931 escalated the government policy of raising nationalist sentiments in the public,

such actions had already begun to take shape after the First World War. The government

established The Peace Preservation Law of 1925 to stop the threat of the spread of

Communism, starting a plethora of subsequent laws that compromised the rights of

many.[40] With the start of the war, the incentive for the government's attempt to control

the thought of its citizens grew, which resulted in many more such policies.

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[40] Michiko Yusa, "Nishida and Totalitarianism," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 112.

Moreover, with the negative reaction from the international community after the aggression in Manchuria, the call for the rebuilding of the government around the military increased. By 1932 this force became murderous, culminating in the May 15 Incident, which claimed the life of Prime Minister Inukai.[41] Saitō of the Navy succeeded him, beginning the rule of the military government and an era of ultranationalists.

The rise of nationalism affected the world of academia as well, which Nishida participated in. The Takikawa Incident of 1933 and the Minobe Incident of 1935, named after the professors who were attacked for their liberal, egalitarian views, showed the symptoms of a strong central, fascist government.[42] The Ministry of Education demanded the resignation of both of the professors, and a sense of cautiousness spread throughout the academics of Japan. Writers and philosophers needed to keep in mind that whatever they said could ruin their careers or even be thrown in jail. The suppression of thought and scholarship had begun.

It is important to note at this point that Nishida retired from his position of professor at Kyoto University in 1928 at the age of fifty-eight. By the time the war broke out in 1930 and the suppression of thought began to take place, his age had advanced considerably, especially by the standards of the time. The government looked upon Nishida himself suspiciously until he began publicizing his thoughts on political philosophy on their behalf.[43] These writings in particular are often called into question when Nishida is criticized for his views, and we will examine those closely. But first we will observe Nishida's sentiments towards the events of the time through the more personal eyes of his journals, letters and personal accounts.

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[41] Ishii et.al. *Nihonshi*, 317.
[42] Yusa, "Nishida and Totalitarianism," 113.
[43] Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 31.

Nishida's problems with militaristic nationalism are evident as early as the victory at Port Arthur against the Russians in 1905. As noted earlier, not only the Japanese, but also many other Asians drew pride from the victory, and it seems that Nishida was one of them as well. Although Nishida also found pride in his nation's victory, his take on the celebrations that followed was divergent from those of his peers. In his journal entry for that day he notes:

> This afternoon I sat in meditation. At noon there was a rally in the park to celebrate the fall of Port Arthur. I could hear people shouting "Banzai!" They are going to have a lantern procession this evening to celebrate the occasion. How fickle the heart to give itself to such foolish festivities! People don't think about the many lives that were sacrificed and about the fact that the war has still a long way to go before it ends.[44]

Nishida's view towards war became increasingly negative, as Japan's relationship with the world became more militaristic. By the time Japan had attacked the United States fleet in Pearl Harbor, his irritation had turned to depression. As his disciple Aihara Shinsaku, who visited him in the hospital during a bout with a rheumatic condition recalls:

> I will never forget the expression on his face when I told him what was in the articles prominently displayed in the special editions of the newspapers. It was a face filled with grave concern and anxiety over the terrible force that had been let loose. There was nothing in him of the excitement over a great victory that most people felt. At that moment, his whole body had become one mass of sadness.[45]

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[44] Yusa, "Nishida and Totalitarianism," 122.
[45] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 86.

The Japanese government entered the Fifteen Year War under the banner of uniting East Asia into the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." Japan saw itself as the leader of the region, carrying the responsibility of uniting it in order to combat the imperialistic West. Indeed, history has shown that the West was a threat to the sovereignty of many nation-states in East Asia. However, as Sun Yat-sen warned, Japan had become an imperialist as well. Nishida also saw the need for international cooperation in the future of Japan as a nation. But as we see in this interaction between Nishida and the leaders of the Army recorded by Tanabe Juri, we see that his sympathy is with Sun Yat-sen, not his country men:

> What are you saying? It sounds like imperialism to me! You call it a "Co-Prosperity Sphere," but how can it be co-prosperity if it doesn't meet the needs of all the peoples involved? If it means giving our side the right to make all the decisions and tell the other side to "Do this and don't do that," it is a simple coercion sphere, not a co-prosperity sphere.[46]

As this outburst indicates, there was an element of frustration in Nishida's views of the military. Throughout Japan's aggression in Asia and the Pacific War, Nishida spoke out his views concerning Japan's place in the world, but as we shall see later, his views were often misinterpreted. As Ueda Shizuteru argues in his essay "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," Nishida used the very terms that the military used in his essays and gave them new meaning in what Ueda calls "the tug-of-war over meaning."[47] Because of the heavy censorship and strict policing of academic ideas, Nishida sought to change the

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[46] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 90.
[47] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 90.

very meaning of the imperialistic jargon through his philosophy and prestige. Sadly, his

attempts were usually to no avail, and his despair is well spelled out in one of his letters:

>I get more and more disgusted at what I read in the papers. My ideas are not
>
>being understood at all. Nothing seems to get through. The expressions I used
>
>are not important; what matters are the basic principles behind them.[48]

Nishida was equally critical of the Ministry of Education's attempt to suppress

ideas threatening to the agenda of the government. In 1935, he wrote a letter to the

Committee for the Renewal of Education and Scholarship that was established by the

Ministry of Education, which sought to flush out what was truly Japanese in the

education system. In it, Nishida argues that impeding the academic process of Japan

stops its growth, saying that "A spirit that rests only on the past and lacks a future is no

longer living."[49] Instead, Nishida insists that Japan should cultivate its potential so that it

can truly contribute to the world. Needless to say, Nishida's letter was less than

appreciated by the Ministry, and would have been suppressed had it not been for his

colleagues on the committee.

NISHIDA AND THE NATIONAL POLITY

The texts in this chapter thus far have given us the context of Nishida's political

philosophy of the time that we must consider. A few points may be drawn from this.

First, Nishida was apparently less than supportive of the war effort, as his negative

reactions to the military's early victories suggest. His personal texts and his outburst to

the Army officials indicate that privately, and at least to some extent publicly, Nishida

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[48] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 90.
[49] Yusa, "Nishida and Totalitarianism," 116.

was opposed to the war. Thus we can say that privately, and to some extent publicly, Nishida's nationalism was not militaristic.

Secondly, we can safely say that Nishida was opposed to the ultranationalistic agenda of the Ministry of Education. The letter to the Committee for the Renewal of Education and Scholarship reflects that view. Further, the fact that he refused to attend the meetings of the Committee illustrates his lack of optimism towards the chances of his views being incorporated by the Ministry. It is clear that the Ministry sought to build an educational system that truly reflected the "Japanese spirit," void of all Western influences. Nishida's fascination and love for Western philosophy undoubtedly opposed this method of achieving the "Japanese spirit."

In addition to his disagreements with the Ministry of Education, Nishida also had to figure out *how* he would disagree with it. As it was noted earlier, ideas and thoughts of academics were closely watched, and the essence of Nishida's disagreements was sensitive areas to the military controlled government. We must keep in mind as we read Nishida's political philosophy that he needed to be cautious of how he used and criticized certain words and phrases such as "the Japanese spirit." One critical mistake could have meant ending his voice in the matter permanently. Given his prestige and validity to the Japanese at the time, this was a factor to be conscious of.

The method that Nishida chose to use, as was alluded to earlier, was the use of the terminology of the government and transforming their meanings to support his own philosophy. Thus, Nishida ends up supporting ideas such as the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, but not in the way the military saw it. In this way began the "tug-of-

war over meaning." As many scholars agree today, accusing Nishida of supporting the military agenda only comes from a shallow reading of his words.

The end of the Fifteen Year War brought all nationalistic thought in Japan under scrutiny, and the Kyoto School philosophy was no exception. Consequently, there is a wealth of discussion in the world of academia concerning the topic of Nationalism and Nishida. In putting my arguments into context, it is worth briefly reviewing the current trends of such literature.

Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School and the Question of Nationalism is an anthology edited by Heisig and John C. Maraldo containing a wealth of helpful scholarship concerning this particular topic. Among these essays are a few written directly about the interpretation of Nishida's philosophy. Although there are many unanswered questions, for the most part the scholars seem to agree that Nishida's philosophy was misused to support the nationalism of the militaristic government.

The introduction of the selections in the *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy* written by the editors of the volume David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo and Agustin Jacinto Zavala also offers great insight into Nishida's political philosophy and the critiques of it as well. It must be mentioned that the two primary texts used in this essay, "Fundamental Principles of a New World Order" and "On National Polity," were taken from this *Sourcebook*, and were translated by the editors.

The editors of the *Sourcebook* seem to disagree with Heisig's comment in *The Philosophers of Nothingness* stating that Nishida's political philosophy diverged from his fundamental inspiration. According to the editors, Nishida's political works were, "brilliantly consistent applications of Nishida's cultural, existential, and metaphysical

templates to the contemporary realities of the China and Pacific wars and to the

envisioned inter-civilizational prospects of the postwar era."[50] Further, they agree with

Ueda's views mentioned earlier that Nishida worked to reinterpret the language of the

military government.[51]

Building on the comments of the editors of the *Sourcebook*, it is the scope of this

thesis to suggest that one of Nishida's fundamental inspirations was the fruitful encounter

between the East, in this case Japan, with the West through religious discourse. Because

of the violent course the relationship between Japan and the rest of the world took,

Nishida naturally had to apply his philosophy of nothingness to the realities of the world

in an effort to construct a peaceful, new world order. In this action, Nishida correctly

realized that there could not be a successful religious dialogue without peace between the

nations.

In his short work "Fundamental Principles of a New World Order" of 1943,

Nishida briefly outlines what the new world should look like. He argues that whereas the

eighteenth century was the age of individual awakening, the 19th century was the age of

the gradual self-awakening of nations, each awakening to its historical mission.

Unfortunately, many nations saw their historical mission as merely imperialism, resulting

in the two Great Wars. Thus Nishida suggests that there needs to be a new world order to

combat this problem of conflict. Nishida insists that each nation must "awaken to its

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[50] David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo with Agustin Jacinto Zavala, commentary to *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*, trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin Jacinto Zavala, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 16.

[51] Dilworth, *Sourcebook*, 17.

world-historical mission and for each to transcend itself while remaining thoroughly true to itself, and to construct one 'multi-world' *(sekaiteki sekai)*."[52]

In this sense, Nishida argues that the League of Nations is insufficient for the task because it merely recognizes the independence of each nation. The East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere would liberate the East Asian nations from the imperialism of the West, allowing each of them to be awakened to their own world-historic mission as an independent world-within-the-world.[53] This point Nishida makes repeatedly: while nations must transcend themselves in order to create one world, it does not mean the negation of any nation and its people. The Japanese military saw their nation as superior to any other, and Nishida directly opposes this view, saying that each nation plays a vital role in the creation of the one world. He compares this concept to an organism, which requires each part of its body to function successfully.[54] If we recall Nishida's argument with the Army officials, we see that he advocates a co-prosperity sphere in the exact meaning of the worlds, not a coercion sphere. While applauding the concept of a co-prosperity sphere, Nishida emphasizes his difference with the military with the following phrase:

> However, as a racialism that centers only on its own people and is devoid of true worldhood within itself—that is to say, a racialism that merely thinks of the rest of the world only from its own perspective—is nothing but a racist egotism; and

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[52] Kitarō Nishida, "Fundamental Principles in a New World Order," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*, trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin Jacinto Zavala, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 73.
[53] Nishida, "Fundamental Principles," 74.
[54] Nishida, "Fundamental Principles," 75.

what emerges from that cannot but degenerate as a matter of course into aggression or imperialism.[55]

Nishida also brings up the topic of education in his brief essay. While acknowledging that Anglo-American thought should be rejected because of its imperialistic view of East Asia, he also shows direct criticism of the Japan's education policy. He argues that the policy should not be one of totalitarianism that contributes to factionalism, but rather one that gives the opportunity for every subject to serve the Imperial Way through an education.[56]

Nishida's call for global cooperation appears in 1944 in his essay entitled "On the National Polity." In it, Nishida goes into further detail of what a nation is and how it must relate to the world. He argues that a nation is formed when a people have actualized the world in themselves, creating values and culture.[57] In this manner, each individual is a part of the creative process of the nation, uniting the many individuals into one. Thus, he argues,

> the specific becomes the universal in the form of the dialectical identity of the
> specific and the universal; the specific contains the individual, and in itself
> becomes universal by taking the individual many as its own self-determination—
> that is to say, it becomes a creative universal."[58]

As one may be able to guess, this applies not only to individual people, but to individual nations as well. As this level, the individuality of a nation is expressed in the

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[55] Nishida, "Fundamental Principles," 76.
[56] Nishida, "Fundamental Principles," 75.
[57] Kitarō Nishida, "On the National Polity," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*, trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin Jacinto Zavala, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 80.
[58] Nishida, "On the National Polity," 81.

national polity, which is the nation's self-actualization or self-formation that occurs under the individual and the many of its people. Nishida argues that nations must realize that their difference with other nations is not racial, but the differing forms of these self-formations.[59] Similar to the concept of the truly individual person, for a nation to be truly individual, it must unite with other individual nations in the self-formative process of the world. Again, in this creative process no nation is less important than another nation, maintaining itself both as a specific and the universal. However, it must be noted that some nations may play more energetic roles in the process.

Nishida contends that a true nationalism must consist of a "consciousness of responsibility for what I term a multi-world world-formationism."[60] As opposed to the nationalism that the government advocates consisting of xenophobia and a vision founded upon racial superiority, Nishida vies for an outlook that is global-centered. He argues that in order for the nation to be truly expressive of its individual nature, it must contribute to the self-formation of the world, uniting together with other nations. Within this suggestion, we can assume that, if Nishida believes his own philosophy, he is a nationalist, at least in his sense of the word. According to Nishida's philosophy, as a nationalist, not only is it possible to be respectful of other nations, but also it is the only true way to be one. Nishida's framework of nationalism is healthy because it is able to put both the nation and the world at the apex of a person's actions.

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[59] Nishida, "On the National Polity," 82.
[60] Nishida, "On the National Polity," 82.

CONSISTENCIES BETWEEN NISHIDA'S PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL

THOUGHT

In order to determine whether Nishida's philosophy and his political thought

flowed from the same source of inspiration, it is helpful to look for consistencies between

them. Was Nishida's political philosophy totally divorced from his other works? Or was

it a logical course of thought, given his philosophy and historical context? In order to at

least come closer to understanding the answers to these questions, it is important to look

for similarities in the two. When the two studies of Nishida are examined closely, one

would find an overwhelming number of evidence that indicate that his conceptualization

of both religiousness and nationalism fit under the same framework of absolute

nothingness.

As it was articulated in the second chapter, in *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida

sees the basis of all reality to be God, or absolute nothingness.[61] At the point where all

dualities of subject and object are lost, there is one true reality where the experience of

God truly comes to be. From the very beginning of his published works on religious

discourse, until his "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious

Worldview," his monumental work written in his final months, Nishida did not stray

away from this basic idea of absolute nothingness.

Similarly, Nishida's works in political philosophy also contains language of

breaking down dualities. For example, the concepts of true individuality that were

discussed earlier in this chapter employ this idea of non-duality. Nishida explicitly states,

"True individuality has the form of uniting the many in the one."[62] In order to get a

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[61] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 82.
[62] Nishida, "On the National Polity," 79.

deeper understanding of Nishida's comprehension of non-duality and absolute

nothingness, it is important to consult a more refined discussion of it, found in "The

Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview."

In this later work, Nishida's encounter of absolute nothingness becomes not

merely a state of non-distinction but one of interexpression. According to Nishida, an

individual, or the relative, can come to experience God, or the absolute, through the

principle of self-negation.[63] The relative negates itself through an awakening that breaks

down the barriers of dualism, as articulated in *An Inquiry into the Good*. Thus, in an act

of interexpression the self of the relative is negated and the absolute, or true reality,

realizes itself. At the same time as it is a negation of the self, it is an affirmation of the

self because the true self is the locus of this realization of reality. In this manner, there is

a contradiction in the very identity of ourselves: our "selves" are simultaneously

absolutely negated and absolutely affirmed. The truly self-conscious self is aware of this

paradoxical nature of identity of the self.[64]

It is also important to point out that this self-negating nature does not merely

apply to the relative, but also to the absolute as well. According to Nishida, if the

absolute did not also embody this nature it would not be absolute, but merely

transcendental. He argues, "what merely transcends the relative would be nothing at all,

mere nonentity. A God who does not create is an impotent God, is not God."[65] In

Nishida's view, the relationship between God and humankind is not one based on power

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[63] Kitarō Nishida, "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview," in *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth, (Honolulu, Connecticut: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 103.

[64] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 99.
[65] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 68.

where God has power over God's creation, judging the subjects according to actions

undertaken during their temporal lives. Instead of this "transcendent transcendence"

relationship existent in many Christian traditions, Nishida vies for the concept borrowed

from the Buddhist encounter of the absolute: immanent transcendence.[66]

Nishida maintains that for the absolute to be truly absolute, it must have a self-

contradictory nature. However, the dilemma is that there is nothing outside of the

absolute since it is reality itself. Because of this dilemma, it becomes necessary that the

absolute negate itself.[67] Through this self-negation, it expresses itself through realizing

its relation to itself. Again, the absolute cannot be an absolute if it had to realize itself in

relation to something other than itself. In this sense, the absolute must have a

contradictory identity itself. Further, it can be said that God is absolute nothingness and

at the same time absolute being.

The entirety of God's creation is based on its self-contradiction of the absolute,

and the creative nature of it.[68] Our relationship to God wells up out of this self-

affirmation of the absolute through its self-negation, which occurs at the locus of our

"selves." Nishida contends that our religious consciousness comes from no other place

but God through this dynamic activity of creation.[69] This is the explanation to Nishida's

view that "the relation between God and mankind is always to be understood as

dynamically interexpressive based on the principle of self-negation."[70]

These concepts of the principle of self-negation, interexpression, and the

contradictory identity of the true self are all familiar ideas in Nishida's political

[66] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 99.
[67] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 68.
[68] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 78.
[69] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 78.
[70] Nishida, *Nothingness*, 103.

philosophy, especially in the concepts he introduces in his "On the National Polity."

Nishida's framework for a new world order was articulated earlier in this chapter. If read

closely, one can see that the relationship between the individual and the nation and that of

the nation and the world work in the same way of interexpression between the relative

and the absolute in his "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious

Worldview." The individual is simultaneously the specific and the universal as it

contributes to the self-awakening of something larger: the nation. The same holds true

for the nation in relation to the world. The nation must self-negate itself to become the

locus of the world's self-actualization, thus reaffirming its true nature as a nation. The

individual, the nation and the world all possess a contradictory identity of the specific and

the universal through this interexpression.

As it can be seen, Nishida's political philosophy is not a random, unrelated

occurrence on his timeline of thought, but instead incorporates the very fundamental

themes that he developed over the years. Given the events of the world around him, the

way he responded to the war and his method of articulation does not seem unnatural at

all. If anything, it is unfortunate that history has unfairly misunderstood the true meaning

of his philosophy time and time again.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUDING REMARKS

In bringing this thesis to a close, there are a few questions that must be answered. Was Nishida a nationalist? If so, did he contribute to the militaristic agenda of the government? Why did his philosophy enter into the realm of politics? Was this move a divergence from his fundamental inspiration, as James Heisig suggests? Hopefully at this point we can use the preceding discussion to answer these questions, at least to some extent.

Was Nishida a nationalist? By asking this question, we inevitably run into the dilemma of having to put some kind of definition to the word "nationalist." Instead, it may be helpful to ask the question, "What was Nishida's relationship to his nation?" There is no question that Nishida loved Japan, and his journals and letters are filled with evidence of this. Many of his essays after the outbreak of the war are geared towards giving his views on subjects directly related to Japan's policies of the time. Although not discussed in this thesis, his respect and admiration of the Imperial Family is also a strong evidence of his loyalty to his nation. When read in light of his other philosophy, one can see that Nishida's political philosophy is filled with anxiety towards the direction that Japan's relationship to the rest of the world was taking. Indeed Nishida was a nationalist, but at the same time was just as much an individual and a globalist.

How was this loyalty to his nation different from that of the militaristic government? As gathered from the sources used in this essay, it seems evident that Nishida strongly believes that the militarists were leading Japan through a path of destruction not only for surrounding countries, but also for itself. Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, Nishida advocates a nationalism that works to fulfill the self-

awakening of the world itself. In this insistence, we can see that Nishida is indeed a

nationalist, at least in his understanding of the word. The nationalism as described by the

government did not fit the definition of Nishida's because of its destructive nature. The

military did not allow for the self-actualization of the nations it attacked, thus impeding

on the self-awakening of the world. Although Nishida did not directly say it, it is clear

that he did not believe that the government's inclination towards its own nation was true

nationalism precisely because it impeded upon the self-actualization of the world. If we

do not read deeply into the words of Nishida, it is easy to come to the conclusion that his

views were parallel with those of the government. It can be argued that it was this

misunderstanding that despaired Nishida the most. Concerning this, another Japanese

philosopher Shimomura Toratarō has stated:

> After the war, it (Nishida's text) became the brunt of simplistic criticisms. We
>
> must not forget, however, that at the time nobody was able to propose a theory
>
> against the fanatical idea of national polity. We should rather be impressed by
>
> Nishida's courage and fervor.[71]

However, there are also voices that acknowledge Nishida's differences with the

military but are not impressed by his political philosophy. James Heisig, as noted in the

introduction, suggests that Nishida's political philosophy diverges from his fundamental

inspiration. What was Nishida's fundamental inspiration then? Since Heisig does not

offer us any clues, it seems at least fruitful to venture some speculation on it.

Throughout his career Nishida developed his philosophy using an Eastern way of

understanding but assisted by his knowledge of Western philosophy. It can be said that

Nishida was contributing to the self-awakening of his nation by developing a respectable

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[71] Ueda, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," 91.

philosophy that put Japan on the map of academia. For once, Japan was able to refute

Fukuzawa's claim that the only thing spectacular in Japan was its scenery. At the same

time, he worked to contribute to the self-awakening of the world by introducing a new

way of philosophizing to the West. His influence can still be felt in many areas of the

world. A philosophy of the world could not truly be a world philosophy without the

contributions from the East, and Nishida's unique integration of East and West developed

a base from which discourse could begin.

In this manner, the case can be made that at least one of Nishida's fundamental

inspirations was this fruitful encounter between the East and West, and the contribution

to the self-awakening of both his nation and the world. Whether we think that his

political philosophy is a successful one or not, Nishida cannot be criticized for

articulating this view. As opposed to Heisig's comments, if we view Nishida's work in

this light, it can be argued that his political philosophy was the core of his fundamental

inspiration.

While Nishida may have despaired over the public's misunderstandings of his

work during the Fifteen Year War, his message remains relevant as ever in today's

increasingly globalized world. By separating Nishida's political philosophy from his

other works, Heisig fails to understand one of Nishida's most important lessons: a true

religious philosophy must not only transcend life, but be immanent to it as well. All too

often, religious discourse strays away from the realities of the world, ignoring the anguish

of the people who suffer as a result. Nishida reminds us that we must be mindful of how

our actions as individuals and nations contribute to the overall actualization of the world.

Only through self-negation, the attainment of selflessness, can we reach true affirmation

of the self. This is not only the way for us to understand our relationship with God, but also a way to understand our relationship with the rest of the world.

The unhealthy form of nationalism that Nishida argues against exists in all corners of the world today. If we recall, Nishida contends that many nations have failed to express their national polity, or self-formation, in their interaction with the world. When this happens, he claims, the interaction turns into mere imperialism. Today the same imperialism exists in many different forms.

For example, when one examines the current jargon that is circulating around the United States-led "War on Terrorism," one cannot help but encounter language that attempts to define political ideologies using religious terminology. While it is important for religious discourse to be mindful of the historical realities of the world, we must also recognize how this can easily be abused. Can the lines of good and evil truly be drawn according to which nation agrees with the political ideologies of the developed nations?

Imperialism of today also takes the form of economics. Corporate interests have infiltrated the public in many different aspects, ranging from our politicians to the media that informs us. Further, many studies report the degenerative influences of multinational corporations on the cultural and social structures of nations all around the world. Is materialism the culmination of our self-awakening as nations? Is profit the apex that will unite us in this multi-world world-formation?

I, with Nishida, would like to contend that this is not the case, that there is much more to each individual nation than mere economic or political imperialism. Nishida, in his work, labors to offer to the world what he thought was the contribution Japan could make in the self-awakening of the world. In so doing, he gives us the valuable

precedence of international contribution based not on trade or military, but on religious consciousness.

The emphasis put on economic "development" and the "freedoms" of the capitalistic system in today's world raises questions as to what truly needs to be the basis of our increasingly interconnected world. Should globalization truly be the inevitable outcome of economic interdependence? Or can we share something deeper in our mutual understanding of each other? Although these questions are unanswered to this day, Nishida's political philosophy supplies us with a viable starting point in investigating them. This is precisely why Nishida's political philosophy is not a mere distraction to his legacy.

Today, as the War on Terrorism continues, Japan faces the challenge of reexamining its identity and the way it interacts with other nations. The voices of criticism towards the foreign policy that merely sides with the United States have become more evident in recent years. Unfortunately, Japan accomplished very little since the war in terms of rebuilding relationships with its victims of the past. Thus far, the nation has failed to acknowledge its cruelty in its treatment of such regions as Manchuria, earning the anger from those people. Furthermore, the government fails to educate its own children on the mistakes made during the war through a close censure of the history textbooks. Unfortunately, much that Nishida opposed in his day remains today.

However, as the home nation of Nishida, Japan has the opportunity to be a leader in seeking a true, peaceful path towards the self-awakening of the world that is inclusive of everybody. Furthermore, as the aggressor nation in the Fifteen Year War, it can also be said that it is the responsibility of Japan to make amends to the rest of the world by

taking on such a role. Japan possesses the unique history of rising from a feudal society to a global superpower in a relatively short time. It knows what it is like to be marginalized by powerful nations, and to feel the loss of an identity. It is my hope, as it was Nishida's a half a century ago, that this uniqueness of Japan can contribute to a peaceful, new world order.

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