

Japanese and Continental Philosophy

Conversations with the Kyoto School

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Heidegger and Japanese Fascism: An Unsubstantiated Connection

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If one moves in academic circles having to do with modern Japanese political philosophy, it soon becomes clear that Japan's most renowned thinkers of the twentieth century, members of the so-called Kyoto School, were primarily responsible for "defining the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism," and that the major impetus for this nefarious project came from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger.¹ This impression is given by a number of books, some of which are written by renowned scholars and published by prestigious university presses.² These texts criticize the most prominent figures in the Kyoto School—Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Kuki Shūzō, Nishitani Keiji, and Miki Kiyoshi—for promulgating fascistic and ultra-nationalistic ideas, usually by trying to establish "guilt by association" with Heidegger. But on closer examination, the scholarship turns out to be sadly short on facts and long on neo-Marxist jargon and deconstructionist rhetoric. Ideological concerns have stifled philosophical inquiry and are now promoting a kind of censorship that suggests, ironically, a fascism of the left. This would be of no great consequence if fascism had been eradicated after World War II; but since fascistic movements are still very much with us, scholarly discussions of the phenomenon have a responsibility to identify it properly.

This essay engages several concerns. It extends the argument of an article of mine from 1997, "The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School," which shows neo-Marxist criticisms of the Kyoto philosophers to be unfounded, and which appears to have gone largely unnoticed in Europe.³ And since such criticisms of the Kyoto School continue, now on both sides of the Atlantic, it is worthwhile to keep showing how the critics' ideology distorts the picture they present and ignores any studies that point this out. This exercise also serves to outline further, positive dimensions of the political philosophy of the Kyoto

School thinkers. Finally, the appearance of such neo-Marxist criticisms in the United Kingdom prompted an attempt at exchange and dialogue, the failure of which demonstrates how this kind of ideology extends to the politics of publishing in academic journals.

1

So what did the much-criticized Kyoto School philosophers say and write to deserve the moral censure they've been receiving in the Anglophone West? They certainly opposed British, Dutch, and American colonial expansion in East Asia—but only an unregenerate Western imperialist could find their grounds for that opposition invalid. They also venerated the nobler aspects of traditional Japanese culture, and lamented their dwindling vitality under the onrush of mass enthusiasm in Japan for the modern and the Western. Some of them even wrote kind words about the emperor system, and suggested that Japan could become a world power through leading the so-called Great East-Asia Coprosperity Sphere. For all of this they have been dismissed as fascistic ideologues—when in fact the fascism is being conjured up by projections on the part of morally superior commentators from the side of the victorious Americans. These dismissals have had the dismal effect of stunting the growth of English-language studies of the Kyoto School thinkers, as many potential students have been persuaded that those philosophers are promoters of fascism.

Neo-Marxists love to hate the Great East-Asia Coprosperity Sphere, denigrating it as “Japan’s colonial empire.” But if one looks at Nishida’s and Tanabe’s ideas about how the project should work, it is clear there is nothing fascistic or even imperialistic about them. And the nationalistic aspect of those ideas—since Japan is the only Asian nation not to have been colonized by the West, it is natural that it should play a leading role in the Coprosperity Sphere—is balanced by a thoroughgoing internationalism. Christopher Goto-Jones has demonstrated the vacuity of the charges of fascism against Nishida’s political philosophy and shown the distinctly internationalist dimensions of his thinking.⁴ Tanabe’s ideas about individual freedom and the multi-ethnic state, and above all his relentless insistence throughout his career on the primacy of reason, definitively preclude his being a fascist philosopher in any sense of the word. This is made clear in a recent study by David Williams that, among many other things, demonstrates the flimsiness of the grounds for accusing Tanabe of fascist leanings.⁵ In essays written during the thirties, Kuki

expressed optimism about Japan's ability to play a leading role in the Great East-Asia Coprosperity Sphere and help her neighbors combat Western imperialism in East Asia, but his nationalism is again tempered by an emphasis on internationalism as the appropriate strategy for Japan to become a greater power in a globalizing world.⁶

Nishitani has been especially harshly criticized for his contribution to a series of symposia held in 1941 and 1942 and sponsored by *Chūō Kōron*, a well-known literary journal, the transcripts of which were later published under the title *Japan from a World-Historical Standpoint* (1943). In the course of these discussions he said (among many other things) that Japan's assertiveness in its drive to colonize regions of China and South-East Asia, and in its attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor (which had happened shortly before), might not be such a bad thing for East Asia, from a world-historical perspective. One can certainly criticize these remarks for being nationalistic and promoting a kind of imperialism, but the context in which they were made was one in which Japan, as the only major East-Asian country that had not been invaded by the imperialist powers of the West, was simply beginning to follow their example by trying to obtain an overseas empire on behalf of its own, longer-standing emperor. In any case, nationalism and imperialism are different from fascism—as is the scepticism toward modernism evinced by the Kyoto School thinkers generally, and their reverence for what is great in the Japanese tradition.

It is important to understand these symposia in context, insofar as their basic premise is that the army's influence on the government was dangerously bellicose, and that some rational discussion of Japan's foreign policy was desperately needed. The main theme of the first session (November 1941) was originally to be "How to avoid war [with the United States]," but under pressure from government propagandists after the attack on Pearl Harbor it had to be changed to "How to bring the war to a favorable end as soon as possible, in a way rationally acceptable to the Army."⁷ Even though the publisher prudently expurgated the sharp criticisms of the army and General Tojo that appeared in the original transcripts, the published version was immediately attacked by ultranationalist and fascist elements in the government as being too tame, "seditious and anti-war." The army reacted by ordering the suppression of public activities by the "Kyoto faction" and forbidding any further print runs of the book or mention of their ideas in the press.⁸ Such measures would have been unnecessary had the participants in the symposium been the raging fascists they are now accused of being. What is clear is that their

postwar accusers, if they have read the relevant texts at all, have completely ignored their complicated context.

But why cannot these conflicting views in the contemporary academy be taken simply as a matter of disagreements among scholars who offer differing interpretations, without introducing the contentious concept of ideology? The reason is that what traditionally distinguishes philosophy from ideology is that the former is primarily a *questioning*—a questioning of the purported facts of the matter, of the motives and prejudices behind interpretations of the facts, and of any dogmatism that declines to engage in dialogue. Ideology by contrast tends to discourage questioning of the facts so as to promote belief or faith in its system of ideas, and is correspondingly reluctant to engage in any dialogue that might put into question the origin of those ideas. The neo-Marxist scholarship on the politics of the Kyoto School thinkers and their relation to Heidegger is a perfect example of this latter syndrome.

2

It was not until 1994 that a dialogue concerning the politics of the Kyoto School thinkers got under way, with a conference on the topic in New Mexico, the revised proceedings of which were published the following year under the title *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*. What is interesting about this collection of essays is that positions on the Kyoto School divide more or less along national lines, with the Western authors generally being more critical and the Japanese more defensive.⁹ This divide has to be seen against the background of the received view in the Western academy, which conveniently ignores the broader context of international relations formed by Western imperialism—which is that the Pacific War as pursued by the United States was a just war, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor completely unprovoked. It would be hard to take this “Pacific War Orthodoxy” seriously (in David Williams’s apt phrase) if it had not been so clearly manifested in the attitudes that underwrote the United States’ disastrous invasion of Iraq some sixty years later.

None of the neo-Marxist scholars referred to earlier appears in *Rude Awakenings*, but they figure prominently in my piece on “The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School and the Political Correctness of the Modern Academy,” which appeared a couple of years after *Rude Awakenings*. This essay, which remains more or less neutral with respect to the political ideas of the Kyoto School thinkers, examines the grounds for the allegations of fascism

made by scholars such as Harootunian, Dale, Faure, and Pincus against the major Kyoto School thinkers. One would expect to find such allegations to be based on a working definition of fascism and a reading of primary texts containing ideas that meet the criteria for being fascistic. And when Heidegger is invoked as a pernicious influence, one would hope to be shown just which ideas in his works are fascist in tone or orientation, and which fascist currents of thought they fed into in Japan. Yet none of this is to be found in these neo-Marxist excoriations: the allegations remain brazenly unsubstantiated. They depend on quotations taken out of context, tendentious and inaccurate translations, assertions made without justification or argument, and general insinuation and innuendo.

Although I sent copies of the final draft of that article to the authors whose work I had criticized, in the eleven years since its publication I have seen not a single rebuttal of its claims.¹⁰ While the flood of accusations of Kyoto School fascism has abated somewhat, Harry Harootunian continues to prosecute his case. Even though *The Cambridge History of Japan* has been reprinted, the allegations of fascism by Najita and Harootunian in their chapter “Japanese Revolt against the West” remain unchanged. This piece was reprinted without modification in 1998 and again in 1999 in a collection titled *Modern Japanese Thought*.¹¹ So here is a situation where Harootunian’s allegations of Kyoto School fascism in the most prestigious English-language publication on Japan have been shown to be unsubstantiated—and he simply ignores the criticism and keeps on publishing the accusations. See the evil, speak the evil—but keep the ears stopped firmly shut.

A hint of what is behind this tactic can be found in the transcript of a conversation between Harootunian and Naoki Sakai (whose writings on the Kyoto School philosophers are often very critical but always responsibly argued), published in 1999.¹² Here Harootunian criticizes “the model of the colonial regime for area studies” of Japan in the United States, and the resistance to “theory” manifested by the conservative American scholars of Japan who had dominated the field since the end of World War II.¹³

Theory teaches us to question the object itself, the object of our inquiry. What’s revealed . . . is that the object of knowledge is a fiction. . . . The object [in this case] is held together by the complicit relations between American scholars and Japanese scholars. This is why the introduction of theory is seen as so dangerous and why professional journals like the *Journal of Japanese Studies* will do anything to suppress it. *What counts is who has the power to make their fiction*

stick. . . . Enormous resources are involved in this. We're not just talking institutional resources; we're talking about social power, status, jobs, fellowships.¹⁴

He has a point here, insofar as the neo-Marxists have tried to exert a Foucauldian-style power through their knowledge of materials in Japanese that are inaccessible to scholars who do not read the language. And because some of them occupy powerful positions at top universities, people in Japanese studies have been reluctant to question their criticisms of the Kyoto School.

So, now “theory” appears to have supplanted “facts” in the postmodern academy. But can “the object of knowledge” *always* be a fiction? It seems unhelpful to claim so, since the practical distinction between fiction and fact would then collapse altogether. It is reasonable to say, for example, that we know for a fact that Heidegger resigned from the rectorship of Freiburg University in April 1934, twelve months after his being appointed. We can also more or less agree on what kinds of new evidence would require us to reassess that fact and to say that we “now know” that he resigned at a different time. Of course, what we think we know about history and refer to as “historical fact” always obtains within a certain horizon of interpretation; and as horizons of interpretation vary across cultures and change over time, the realm of historical fact is altered accordingly. Yet the general distinction between fact and fiction, while subject to blurring and modification, remains a helpful one—such that one needs compelling circumstances to abandon it.

The first name Harootunian mentions in his book from the following year, *Overcome by Modernity*, and in its very first sentence, is “Friederich [*sic*] Nietzsche.” Perhaps his invoking power in connection with fiction is meant in the spirit of Nietzsche’s famous (but unpublished) dictum: “There are not any facts, only interpretations.”¹⁵ It could derive from a quasi-Nietzschean understanding of the world as a field of interpretive forces, a play of will to power: if one excels at such play, one can make one’s fiction stick by having one’s will prevail, one’s world interpretations hold sway.

Yet when Harootunian says, “What counts is who has the power to make their fiction stick,” one is reminded less of Nietzsche than of the American neoconservatives’ contempt for members of what they call “the reality-based community.” To adapt that laudably forthright statement by the senior adviser to George W. Bush: “We’re an empire now, and when we write, we create our own reality.”¹⁶ Just as the Bush administration’s strategy of endlessly repeating the mantra *Saddam Hussein/Al Qaeda* had two-thirds of the American people believing for several years that Iraq was implicated in the attacks of 9/11, so

Harootunian's mantra *Kyoto School/Heidegger's fascism* seems to be effective in the academic world. Of course the bulk of the American people had to be made to believe in "our own reality," to accede to that interpretation of the world, but this hardly validates it.

Nietzsche was a philologist as well as a philosopher, and through practicing that science he came to appreciate the salutary power of scientific scholarship in general. And so a practice like Harootunian's, whereby one acknowledges sources and texts in the name of doing history but then simply says what one wants regardless of evidence or justification of any kind, is from a Nietzschean perspective utterly inadmissible. By contrast with ego-assertion through "social power and status," will to power at its noblest wills through the world rather than the ego, and exercises power through clear and responsible interpretation.¹⁷

3

In the introduction to *Overcome by Modernity* Harootunian explains that the work "grew out of a collaboration with Tetsuo Najita that produced . . . 'The Revolt against the West.'"¹⁸ The reader who consequently expects more on the putative fascism of the Kyoto School is not disappointed, though now the main target is the philosopher Miki Kiyoshi, who is described as "clearly associated with Kyoto philosophy."¹⁹

The book begins with an account of a well-known symposium on "Overcoming Modernity" that took place in 1942 and some of Nishitani's contribution to it, followed by a discussion of the symposia on "Japan from the Standpoint of World History." It is a relief to find that the "philosophic-contours-of-Japanese-fascism" refrain is now quite muted, being relegated to a dismissive endnote: "But also see Horio Tsutomu, 'The Chūō Kōron Discussions: Their Background and Meaning' . . . for a thinly disguised whitewash of this symposium, whose major orientation was philosophic fascism."²⁰ The claim that no group in prewar Japan "came closer" than the philosophers of the Kyoto faction to "defining the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism" was merely asserted by Najita and Harootunian in "The Revolt against the West," with not a shred of evidence given in support of it. By contrast, Horio's analysis of the *Chūōkōron* discussions is based on painstaking research into the original sources and makes nonsense of the idea that the group was in any way promoting or supporting fascism. If Harootunian wants to claim that this is "a thinly disguised whitewash" he had better provide some substantive

justification, either by showing that Horio is misquoting and/or misinterpreting the transcripts of the symposia, or else by quoting from them himself in order to show just how they constitute “a major orientation [of] philosophic fascism.” David Williams’s devastating criticisms of Harootunian’s account of the symposia show that Harootunian is no more interested in even getting the basic facts concerning them right than in offering interpretations based on readings of the primary texts.²¹

Turning to Miki Kiyoshi, Harootunian first introduces him in a tone of some equivocation: Miki often skirted with forms of fascist totalizing, even though he also sought to distance himself and Japan from an identity with it. Nevertheless, there is a good deal of folkic totalism in Miki’s thinking, which in lesser hands or more determined thinkers . . . easily slipped into fascism.²²

For readers acquainted with Miki’s writings, who was profoundly influenced by Marx and studied and wrote about Marxism for many years, this insinuation of a penchant for fascism will come as a surprise. Even Harootunian himself has to acknowledge that Miki’s “Marxian phase . . . in a certain sense remained with him until the end.”²³ One would have thought that having such a prolonged Marxian phase would have kept him from slipping into fascism. But perhaps Harootunian will amaze after all by adducing works that have been overlooked by others, or else by demonstrating through analysis of familiar texts an agenda that runs counter to the received view of Miki as a good Marxist.

The first forty pages of the last chapter of *Overcome by Modernity* discuss Miki’s political philosophy, which, according to Harootunian, has two sides. One side is introduced by the “guilt-by-association-with-Heidegger” trick: Miki is said to be “deeply implicated in Heidegger,” though just what this unusual condition consists in is left unspecified.²⁴ In fact Harootunian himself admits two sentences later that Miki distanced himself from the German thinker whose work he had at first admired:

Despite the hostility he registered in response to Heidegger’s Rector address and his decision to join the Nazi party in 1933, there was simply no way of bridging Miki’s two sides: the philosopher analyzing the “current situation” (Marxism) and the thinker promoting the space of Asia (fascism). . . . In this sense he remained true to the Marxian analytic, even though his theory of action promising a solution bordered on fascism.²⁵

After “skirting with” fascism, Miki’s ideas are now bordering on it, thanks somehow to his “promoting the space of Asia.” But since a continuing loyalty

to Marxism would tend to render one immune to the lures of fascism, expectations of a truly spectacular revelation from Harootunian become ever greater.

Instead, there ensues an exposition (often obscured by the opacity of Harootunian's jargon-ridden prose) of Miki's writings during his explicitly Marxist period, after which the term "fascism" begins to reappear.²⁶ Referring to Miki's later treatment of the relationship between politics and culture, Harootunian writes:

Yet this concern surely constituted a sign of a global historical conjuncture where fascism was increasingly the political strategy employed to save capitalism. . . . But this attempt to realign politics and culture . . . showed clearly the linking of fascism and imperialism that . . . others would see as a natural manifestation of the expansion of the communal body.²⁷

Whatever these sentences mean, we are given no reasons for believing that, if indeed Miki was concerned with saving capitalism, the strategy he proposed for doing so was fascist—or that he advocated anything like a linking of fascism and imperialism.

Harootunian goes on to generate a great deal of heat around Miki's concern with the "people" (*minzoku*), which he makes sound sinister by translating the term consistently, and misleadingly, as "folk." Why render a word that means "people" or "nation" by the bizarre term (in this context, at least) "folk"? An associate of Harootunian's, Leslie Pincus, has given the answer in the context of another Kyoto School thinker: "Kuki drew, no doubt, on the semantic resources of the German *Volk*—'folk' in English—and as a translation, 'folk' would have the advantage of invoking the German fascist politics associated with the term."²⁸ This misleading translation will serve the purpose, then, of linking Kuki, and now Miki, to fascism in Germany. But Harootunian himself has to admit, in discussing Miki's ideas about the Japanese people: "This kind of folkism, observed in Japan and throughout East Asia, differed from the volkisch ideology of national socialism and was not necessarily incompatible with 'globalism.'"²⁹ Not at all incompatible—and in fact it is central to the political philosophy of the Kyoto School during the 1930s that nationalism and what they call "Japanism" are completely compatible with internationalism.³⁰ Harootunian's emphasis on the "folk" in Miki serves to bend his thought in the direction of National Socialism, so as to facilitate the underhanded application of the "fascism" label. Underhanded, because Harootunian presents not a shred of evidence for the claim that Miki espoused any kind of fascism, but simply piles on the solemn asseverations.

In Miki's reasoning, the idea of social order that the present required was one that "had to transcend modern *gesellschaft* to conform to a new *gemeinschaft*" (14:263). This new *gemeinschaft* was to be seen not as a throwback to a primitive or feudal community (here, his fascism was both modern and rational), but rather as one that now was capable of sublating (*shiyō*) modern society within itself.³¹

After more than thirty pages of innuendo, it suffices simply to insert a parenthetical remark about the nature of Miki's putative fascism and the case is made. But granted that Miki advocated a new *Gemeinschaft*, we would need to be told what features of this new community make it fascistic. Instead, Harootunian merely raises the specter of "the organicity implied by Miki's conception of fashioning a community"—a bizarre idea, since something that is growing organically can hardly be fashioned—without citing as evidence any text of Miki's discussing organicity. Perhaps we are supposed to be stunned by this utterly unsupported *non sequitur*: "In Miki, this organicism led to political totalitarianism since *techné* and *physis* shared a common origin."³² Again, we would need to hear which features of Miki's putative organicism made the good Marxist go so totalitarian.

Although the climax of Harootunian's discussion begins hesitantly with yet another admission of Miki's distaste for fascism (almost as if made for television, with fair and balanced presentations), it immediately turns unequivocally assertive:

He often sought to distance himself from historic fascisms . . . even as his analysis of Japan's modernity and his defence of imperialism led him to imagine an order that was just as fascistic, inasmuch as it sought to salvage capitalism and the folk which had been estranged from it in its original form as an organic community. A "modern *gemeinschaft*" propelled by technological rationality and an organicist folk cooperativeness was simply another name for fascist political totalitarianism.³³

As if to set a seal of validity on this preposterous claim, the next phrase reads (as the title of the chapter's last section) "Folkism and the Specter of Fascism"—though there is no further discussion of Miki or his work.

We might call Harootunian's method here "the Don Basilio approach," after the character in Rossini's *Barber of Seville* who sings famously of the insidious power of *la calunnia* (slander).³⁴ Slander should be initiated as "a tiny breeze, a gentle little zephyr, which insensibly, subtly, gently, sweetly be-

gins to whisper,” becoming “crescendo, gathering force little by little” until, growing like “the thunder of the storm rumbling in the depths of the forest,” it finally “explodes with a crack and crash, like a cannon or an earthquake,”—*fortissimo: il fascismo!*

Over forty pages of text, Harootunian provides no evidence to support the bizarre conclusion that Miki’s philosophy turned fascistic. To the minimal extent that there is an argument here, it consists of a travesty of the deconstructive method: Because Miki distanced himself from Heidegger’s association with Nazism, he was deeply implicated in it; even though he seemed to remain true to Marxism and was repelled by European fascism, he actually supported the Japanese fascists; in short, because nothing overtly fascistic is to be found in Miki’s political ideas, he was in fact advocating “fascist political totalism.”

In the light of such a travesty of scholarly argument what is puzzling—and revelatory about the contemporary state of Japanese studies in the United States—is the admiration that *Overcome by Modernity* appears to have generated on the part of some major figures in the field.³⁵ Has ideology so permeated historical scholarship that reasoned argument on the basis of textual evidence has become *passé*? When the application of the “fascist” label to thinkers one dislikes has been shown to be unfounded, is it praiseworthy simply to ignore this awkward circumstance and go on doing the same thing at greater length?

Another version of the Don Basilio strategy, shorter and *mezzo piano*, is to be found in Goto-Jones’s treatment of Miki in *Political Philosophy in Japan*. Here we learn at first that Miki is among those associates of Nishida who “disfigured themselves” (scare quotes in the original) “by explicitly placing solidarity before criticism, becoming ‘professional’ or ‘bureaucratic’ intellectuals.”³⁶ We are told that Miki became “a central ideologue of Prince Konoé’s New Order Movement,” though we hear nothing about the kind of ideology he promoted there. A few pages later Goto-Jones plays the Heidegger card: “In the late 1930s/early 1940s, Miki executed an about face, a ‘turn’ toward endorsement of the state paralleled by Heidegger’s coincident ‘turn’ in Germany.”³⁷ If the second “turn” here refers to Heidegger’s famous (and perhaps never accomplished) *Kehre*, it is not toward endorsement of the state but toward the thinking of Being; if it refers to his earlier involvement with National Socialism, it disregards the fact that Miki became critical of Heidegger as a result of that turn of events in 1933.³⁸ But now that the mention of Heidegger has presumably triggered the idea of “fascism” in the minds of the *cognoscenti*, there comes, on the next page, the crescendo:

Miki argued [in an essay titled “Principles of New Japanese Thought”] that Japan’s unique ability to unite Asia rested on its history of assimilating foreign (Chinese) culture, giving it the understanding to instigate a *kyōdōtai* (cooperative body) in East Asia. Japan’s assimilation of Western technology gave it the power necessary to expel the West from China, which was crucial before a peaceful *kyōdōtai* could be established on the principles of cooperativism (*kyōdōshugi*), which he envisioned as an Asian alternative to socialism and liberalism.³⁹

So far, so good. Japan had certainly assimilated foreign cultures more comprehensively than any other nation in East Asia, which might well justify a leadership role. And it was certainly the only nation in the region with sufficient military strength to stand a chance of ousting the Western powers from China: A laudable enough aim—except for die-hard imperialists who think the Western powers had some legitimate business in occupying the Central Kingdom. But then, after adding that “much of Miki’s language appeared in Prime Minister Kono’s proclamation of the new world order in East Asia” (though without saying exactly what language or specifying its political tenor), Goto-Jones clinches the argument with a startling *non sequitur*: “With Miki, a strand of the Kyoto School is securely woven into fascist thread.” Now that this has been established, he is free to drop a remark, in a later footnote, about “Miki’s fascist standpoint.”⁴⁰ But as with Harootunian, the “fascist” label is applied on the basis of nothing in the way of evidence but simply on the claims that Miki had “disfigured himself” as an intellectual, made a Heidegger-like “turn” toward endorsement of the state, and promoted an Asian alternative to socialism and liberalism. But in Asia, as elsewhere, there are ways for intellectuals to disfigure themselves, and to endorse the state, and to pose alternatives to socialism and liberalism, that have nothing whatever to do with fascism.

It is unlikely that Goto-Jones deliberately set out to condemn Miki as a fascist thinker, insofar as the latter is a peripheral figure in *Political Philosophy in Japan* who stands in “Nishida’s shadow” as a Kyoto “Rebel.” But the insouciance with which Goto-Jones applies the fascist label to Miki (by contrast with his careful and measured exposition of Nishida’s political philosophy) suggests that the Harootunian ideology is taking hold in the European academy too.

4

The glad tidings were apparently brought to the shores of Albion a couple of years earlier, by Stella Sandford’s article “Going Back: Heidegger, East Asia

and ‘the West,’” which was published in *Radical Philosophy* in 2003. The opening paragraph begins by invoking Heidegger’s influence on Miki, Nishitani, Tanabe, and Kuki.⁴¹ But when Sandford goes on to claim that Miki was the only one, and the only Marxist, to seriously criticize Heidegger after 1933, she goes astray. The philosopher Tosaka Jun was a more committed Marxist than Miki, and he criticized Heidegger often.⁴² More importantly, Miki was not alone in criticizing Heidegger for the infamous Rectoral Address. In September 1933 (shortly before Miki’s criticisms were published) Tanabe wrote a commentary on “The Self-Assertion of the German University” in which he criticized Heidegger’s “championing of the racial significance of German academia.”⁴³ But then Sandford closes the paragraph with a topic sentence making this breathtaking assertion: “The most influential reception of Heidegger’s work fed into the philosophical justification of fascism in Japan, as Tanabe’s writings in particular show.”⁴⁴ And where does one learn about this philosophical justification of fascism in Japan? The endnote cites two sources: for Miki, it is the chapter in Harootunian’s *Overcome by Modernity*, just discussed and found less than reliable; and for Tanabe, it is an essay by Naoki Sakai titled “Ethnicity and Species.”⁴⁵

The impression that the philosophical justification of fascism is going to be a major theme in Sandford’s essay is reinforced in the last paragraph of her introduction, where we read that the comparative literature on Heidegger is misleading insofar as it “facilitates the repression of the history of Heideggerian fascism in modern East-Asian, and particularly Japanese, thought.” Her fantasy is farther-reaching than Harootunian’s: Heidegger’s pernicious influence has now apparently spread to fascists in China and Korea as well. Readers keen to learn the identities of these East-Asian fascists who were influenced by Heidegger will be disappointed, since no sources are cited for this expansionist claim. Then, strangely, what appeared to be a key topic—the way “Heidegger’s work fed into the philosophical justification of fascism in Japan”—simply disappears from the essay until one page before the end, where Sandford again deplores a supposed “silence on the fascist reception of Heidegger in Japan.”⁴⁶ That this framing assertion of a Heideggerian fascism in Japan should enclose nothing in the way of justification, or even discussion, shows just how powerful the invocation of Harootunian is expected to be. But non-believers will want to be pointed to the specific Kyoto School texts that go beyond nationalism, patriotism, and militarism as far as “philosophical justifications of fascism”—and to the respects in which these show the influence of Heidegger.

It is strange that Sandford should cite Sakai's essay on Tanabe as a justification for her claim that Heidegger's work fed into the philosophical justification of fascism in Japan, since nowhere in that essay is there any discussion of fascism *or* Heidegger.⁴⁷ But in case Sakai does address these topics but indirectly, between the lines as it were, we should examine the argument of "Ethnicity and Species," since it might turn out to be an indictment of Tanabe's Heideggerian fascism after all. The essay is a critical exposition of such ideas as ethnicity and subjectivity as articulated in a series of essays that Tanabe published during the period from 1932 to 1946, and which were eventually collected under the title *Logic of Species*. Sakai also criticizes an infamous lecture Tanabe delivered at Kyoto Imperial University in 1943, "Death and Life," and for which he later expressed profound regret. He sums up the main thrust of the lecture as follows: "Having anticipatorily put oneself on the side of death, and thereby secured one's loyalty to the country, one could in fact transform or even rebel against the existing state under the guidance of the universal idea."⁴⁸ Sakai adds that Tanabe was somewhat naive in failing to see that his argument "could easily be distorted or appropriated to serve unintended political interests." Fair enough—but it is hard to imagine the leaders of a fascist state agreeing that their subjects might be justified in "rebell[ing] against the government at any time."

A similar idea is prominent in the *Logic of Species*, where it is clear that "the nation-state is primarily and essentially something to which the individual *chooses* to belong," and where this belonging must be "mediated" by the individual's "*freedom*."⁴⁹ For Tanabe the individual only truly belongs to the nation-state when it tries, as Sakai puts it, to "negate and change it," when it "distances itself" from it, "actively transforming it, according to the dictates of universal humanity."⁵⁰ Or in Tanabe's own words:

Membership in the state should not demand that the individual sacrifice all its freedom and autonomy for the sake of the unity of the species [in Tanabe's sense of the nation-state]. On the contrary, the proposition would not make sense unless the state appropriates into itself individual freedom as its essential moment.⁵¹

Sakai then draws the conclusion: "Therefore the view which equates the nation-state with one ethnic community cannot be accepted at all"—whence Tanabe's promotion of the "multi-ethnic state" of Sakai's subtitle. Again, these are hardly ideas that would have delighted the fascists in Japan, or in Europe for that matter—so it remains a mystery why Sandford should think that

“Tanabe’s writings in particular show” that the reception of Heidegger’s work “fed into the philosophical justification of fascism in Japan.”

While Sandford elsewhere in her article makes a valid criticism or two of some of the “comparative literature” on Heidegger, her complaints that commentators (and especially Parkes) have naively overlooked Heidegger’s Eurocentrism, nationalism, and association with Nazism, and so have been silent about “the fascist reception of Heidegger in Japan,” are groundless.⁵² It is true that I have not denounced the fascist reception of Heidegger in Japan, but this is only because the existence of such a phenomenon has never been demonstrated.⁵³ On the topics of Heidegger’s nationalism and putative influence on Japanese fascism, however, I had already published two articles in places where anyone doing research on the comparative literature on Heidegger would easily have found them.⁵⁴ So why does Sandford, whose research seems to have been thorough in other respects, fail to take these into account? Either she ignores them because they undermine her main thesis, or else her infatuation with Harootunian’s work has blinded her to the existence of anything that contradicts it. In any case her essay is evidence that Harootunian’s strategy of relentless assertion of his ideological position, combined with complete silence in response to criticism and adamant refusal to engage in dialogue with dissenters, is working quite well on the British side of the Atlantic.

After making sure that *Radical Philosophy* was prepared to accept a response to Sandford’s article, I submitted a lengthy refutation which pointed out that, among other things, she had misrepresented and criticized my work on the basis of a reading which omitted key contributions such as the “Putative Fascism” essay. The “Editorial Collective” at *Radical Philosophy* (which does not deign to send submissions out for external review, and of which Sandford is a member) turned it down. I sent in a revised version that responded to the few valid minor criticisms they had made, and that was also turned down, again without any attempt to respond to the main arguments.⁵⁵

What we have here is a continuation of the Harootunian strategy of silencing the opposition by pretending it does not exist, and so far it seems to be catching on in the United Kingdom. The reasons for being concerned about this still hold: Prospective students of the Kyoto School thinkers continue to be put off studying them by reading first that they are fascist ideologues, just as Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis justifies not bothering to read his works. The political philosophies of these thinkers continue to be relevant today, even if they contain features that we find disconcerting or distasteful.

These things need to be discussed—especially since fascism is still with us, in pockets of virulence all over the world. It helps to acknowledge the decisive ideas and conditions motivating fascist activity and to correctly identify their sources. It is a distraction to expose and condemn as fascist ideas that are not fascistic—and it is time, instead, to devote our energies to the central tasks of careful inquiry and responsible critique.

NOTES

An earlier version of this essay was published in the journal *Pli* 20 (2009): 226–48, and I thank the editors for their permission to publish a revised version here. Thanks also to Brad Park, who offered some helpful comments on the initial draft.

1. Tetsuo Najita and H. D. Harootunian, “Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century,” in Peter Duus, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6: 741–42; Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, N.J., and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 359ff.

2. Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and a journal article by Stella Sandford, “Going Back: Heidegger, East Asia and ‘the West,’” *Radical Philosophy* 120 (July/August 2003): 11–22.

3. Graham Parkes, “The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School and the Political Correctness of the Modern Academy,” *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 3 (1997): 305–36.

4. See the discussions of Nishida in Christopher S. Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity* (London: Routledge, 2005); also Graham Parkes, “The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School,” in Christopher Goto-Jones, ed., *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 161–82.

5. David Williams, *Defending Japan’s Pacific War: The Kyoto School Philosophers and post-White Power* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), esp. 92–116. This book also contains a translation by Williams of Tanabe’s essay “On the Logic of Co-prosperity Spheres: Toward a Philosophy of Regional Blocs.”

6. See Parkes, “The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School,” 164–70.

7. Horio Tsutomu, “The *Chūōkōron* Discussions, Their Background and Meaning,” in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995), 301–302.

8. Horio, “The *Chūōkōron* Discussions,” 291, 303.

9. See Williams, *Defending Japan’s Pacific War*, 147. John Maraldo criticizes Williams’s characterization of *Rude Awakenings* in his review of *Defending Japan’s Pacific*

War and Christopher Goto-Jones's *Political Philosophy in Japan*, "The War over the Kyoto School," *Monumenta Nipponica* 61, no. 3 (2006): 375–406.

10. By contrast with this silence, a Japanese translation of the "Putative Fascism" essay, "Kyōto Gakuha to 'fuashizumu' no reteru: gendai Amerika ni okeru kado na 'seijiteki na tadashisa' no mondai," was published in the journal *Zengaku Kenkyū* 81 (Kyoto, 2002), and was reprinted in Fujita Masakatsu and Bret W. Davis, eds., *Sekai no naka Nihon no tetsugaku* (Kyoto: Showado, 2005).

Several important studies have appeared that give a clearer picture of the political philosophy of Nishida and other Kyoto School thinkers, and one that confirms the essay's premises: Michiko Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); David Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War* (2004); Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan* (2005); and Hiroshi Nara et al., *The Structure of Detachment: The Aesthetic Vision of Kuki Shūzō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

11. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, ed., *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

12. Harry Harootunian and Naoki Sakai, "Japan Studies and Cultural Studies," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 7, no. 2 (1999): 593–647.

13. Harootunian and Sakai, "Japan Studies and Cultural Studies," 606–608.

14. Harootunian and Sakai, "Japan Studies and Cultural Studies," 611; my emphasis.

15. Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, 12: 315; *The Will to Power*, §481.

16. Ron Suskind, „Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush,“ *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2004.

17. For a more detailed explication of will to power as interpretation, see the translator's introduction to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xx–xxii.

18. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, xxxiii.

19. *Ibid.*, 41.

20. *Ibid.*, 421.

21. Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War*, chap. 4.

22. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, xxxii.

23. *Ibid.*, 365.

24. *Ibid.*, 359.

25. *Ibid.*, 359–60.

26. The text is rife with syntactically challenged sentences and orthographic oddities. The attentive reader will be especially baffled by the discussion of Miki's "theory of action through 'poises'" (a misprint for "poses"?) until much later when the word appears italicized and is associated with the Greek *techn<e,MAC>*—which confirms that Miki (if not Harootunian) is talking about *poi<e,MAC>sis* (360, 387). Numerous similar errors mar the text. Harootunian's frequent discussions of Heidegger undermine themselves by conflating Heidegger's fundamental distinctions between Being and beings (*Sein und Seiendes*: what he calls "the ontological difference") and between Being and Dasein.

27. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 390–91.

28. Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 55. See the discussion of this mistranslation and its consequences in my "The Definite Internationalism

of the Kyoto School,” 164–70, and in the context of Nishida and Tanabe, in Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War*, 160.

29. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 395.

30. See my discussion in “The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School,” 172–75.

31. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 397.

32. *Ibid.*, 398.

33. *Ibid.*, 398–99.

34. “La calunnia è un venticello” in Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, act I, aria 6.

35. See the endorsements and excerpts from reviews on the Princeton University Press website: <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/6954.html>. On the contrast between the current state of Japanese studies in the United States and in Europe, see Williams, 46–49.

36. Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 98.

37. *Ibid.*, 104–105.

38. See Miki’s essay of November 1933, “Haideggaa to tetsugaku no unmei” [Heidegger and the fate of philosophy], in *Miki Kiyoshi zenshū*, 10: 310–20.

39. Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 106.

40. *Ibid.*, 168 n. 4.

41. Sandford, “Going Back,” 11, drawing (with acknowledgment) on some of my work.

42. Sadly little of Tosaka’s work has been translated into English, but see the selections in David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo, trans. and eds., with Agustin Jacinto Zavala, *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 330–71.

43. Graham Parkes, “Rising Sun over Black Forest,” note 13, in Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on His Work*, trans. with an essay by Graham Parkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 109. In the meantime an English translation of Tanabe’s essay has appeared in David Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War*, 181–87; see also Williams’s account of Tanabe’s essay, 114–16.

44. Sandford, “Going Back,” 11.

45. *Ibid.*, 11 n. 3, 20, which cites Naoki Sakai, “Ethnicity and Species: On the Philosophy of the Multi-Ethnic State in Japanese Imperialism,” *Radical Philosophy* 95 (May/June 1999), and Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 358–414.

46. Sandford, “Going Back,” 19.

47. The exception is that at one point in his exposition Sakai resorts to the Heideggerian terms *Geworfenheit* and *Entwurf*, and in an endnote he mentions Tanabe’s criticism of Heidegger for failing “to recognize the spatiality of social practice” (“Ethnicity and Species,” 39, and n. 24).

48. Sakai, “Ethnicity and Species,” 35.

49. *Ibid.*, 35.

50. *Ibid.*, 39–40.

51. Tanabe, “The Logic of Social Ontology,” cit. Sakai, “Ethnicity and Species,” 41.

52. Sandford, “Going Back,” 17–19.

53. For discussions of the receptions of Heidegger’s philosophy in Japan, see Parkes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, 9–11, and “Rising Sun over Black Forest,” 80–81.

54. Six years before “The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School” appeared, I published “Between Nationalism and Nomadism: Wondering about the Languages of Philosophy,” in Eliot Deutsch, ed., *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Per-*

spectives (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 455–67, in which I criticize Heidegger's nationalism and unfavorably compare his obsessive attachment to a particular plot of soil with Nietzsche's nomadic and cosmopolitan commitment to "stay true to the earth."

55. See section 5 of a longer version of this essay in James W. Heisig, ed., *Frontiers in Japanese Philosophy* (Nagoya, Japan: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2009), 6: 335–60; online at <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/EJPhilosophy/EssaysInJapanesePhil.htm>.