

RELIGION AND THE STATE: FROM TANABE'S DIALECTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. *Tanabe Hajime, the Kyoto School philosopher of modern Japan, proposes a new idea of the relationship between religion and politics in terms of the triadic logic of species that is motivated by the religious moment of repentance. Even the state existence has the inherently radical evil as in the case of the individual person, due to its duality of the species level of being. This means that the state existence is on the way of actualization of the genus-like universality, while always involving in the regression into the past substrative being which prevents it from realizing its own universality. In other words, the state existence is not absolute as such but rather a balanced being between ideality and reality, absolute and relative. This entails that politics is in need of perpetual reformation in connection with the religious act of repentance for sin and evil deeply lurked in human beings from time immemorial. Tanabe's Logic of Species as the dialectic elucidates the negative mediation of politics and religion from the metanoetic perspective and sheds a new light on the relation of world religion and politics today.*

KEYWORDS: *religion, the state existence, repentance, sin and evil, Absolute Nothingness, politics, species, dialectic*

Contrary to Hegel, who regards the state existence as the Kingdom of God realized in history, Tanabe asserts that the state existence is inevitably involved in radical evil. For Tanabe, the state is not the realization of eternal truth in the actual world, but is, in its authentic form of the realized universality, sustained through the individual's subjective action mediated by Absolute Nothingness. Radical evil is inherently lurking in the individual as well as in the state, and is to be negated and purified by the religious practice based upon Absolute Nothingness. Absolute Nothingness, however, does not directly operate upon the individual, but only through the mediation of the state. The state existence as such is not absolute, but is relative in the form of mediating balance between the ideal and the real, or between the universal and the individual. The state existence *qua* the species-substratum has the duality of the realization of the genus-like universality and the self-estrangement from it. As far as the state is perpetually renewed in and through its reformatory practice, it is made to exist through the mediation of the individual's act of repentance for evil.

For Aristotle, according to C.C.W. Taylor, the relation of the state and the individual is central for politics in that the role of the state is to enable the individual to realize his potential to achieve his individual good; an achievement impossible unless in the context of the state. Politics is not aimed at limiting the individual's freedom of action, not obligating the individual to obey to the state, but realizing human common good. Human individual good is unattainable except to an active participation in a political community. The individual's participation in a specific form of political organization, in the life of the polis, is essential for a good human life. (*The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995) The individual as the substance cannot exist apart from the particular species, i.e.,

the societal community of the nation state in general. (cf. Aristotle, XVII, *Metaphysics*, I-IX, trans. H. Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1980). In this regard, Tanabe sees in Aristotle's way of thinking the much more fertile potentiality of, and the propensity towards, the further development into a dialectical unification of the opposites in and through negation from his own perspective.

On the importance of religious repentance, Tanabe says that without repentance there can be no act bearing upon Nothingness. Repentance is the indispensable basic moment of act. It is not a special religious act, but rather the utterly necessary condition and universal moment for the returning action [from the transcendental realm] by which ordinary bad persons who are laden with deep sin and inescapably bound up with radical evil are made to participate in absolute mercy and cooperate with its saving activity. Without it, there can be no religious practice.¹ This is because human beings are primordially entangled with radical evil from time immemorial and further in need of renunciation from it. In the reverse side of the practical conversion from Nothingness to being, a human subject is strained by the species-like inertia matter in the form of self-alienation due to the radical evil lurking in the ground of its existence, and hence requires a moment of repentance for redemption from it as the negative mediation of the act by which a mutual identification of the individuality and the totality is to be brought about.

The concrete content of the individual subjective action is mediated in negation by the particular determination of the species-like entity, i.e., the social substratum as the mediation of social practice. Therefore it might be described as 'political' in general. On the one hand, in the aspect of religious act our human practice becomes the subject of repentance, and on the other hand, in the aspect of political action it is mediated by the social substrative entity. The concrete practice is composed of these aspects and constitutes a mutual identification of political action and religious act, substratum and subject, through conversion in negation in the form of being qua nothingness, and *vice versa*.

There is no practice without socio-political substratum. On this point, Tanabe criticizes Hegel for degenerating into the danger of a sort of the emanationist logic of self-identity in terms of contemplation.² If one neglects the self-negating mediation of a socio-material entity on the level of species and oversees the concrete political practice from the standpoint of idealism, then it would betray its ostensible religious tendency and easily fall back to the *status quo*, bound up with self-satisfactory egoism and inertia radical evil, entailing an extreme materialism as a result of corruption of religion. This is because of the overseeing the significance of the material moment within the practical dialectic. The species-like substratum as a moment of practice is not a social material as such, but rather the negative mediation between the genus and the individual. It cannot fulfill the self-manifestation of Nothingness in and by itself. But, on the contrary, it is, so to speak, the relative Nothingness as the mediation toward Absolute Nothingness. It

¹ The Logic of Species as the Dialectic, *The Collected Works of Hajime Tanabe*, Vol.7, p.355, Tokyo: Chikuma 1963.

² *Ibid.*

is not the completion of self-mediation but rather in pursuit of an infinite realization as the possible tendency.

Human existence on the level of being is tenable only in so far as it is mediated by the transcendental principle of Absolute Nothingness in the form of Nothingness *qua* being. The absolute mediation that is accompanied by the returning movement from the transcendental to the historical realm permeates into the root of human existence as radical evil in the form of great compassion and love. We may prove our salvation only to the extent that we are perpetually converted by the acts of faith and repentance and thus mediated by the Absolute in and through the relative movement of returning love to others as well, whereby they are inevitably involved in the reciprocal cooperation of edification with each other. The returning character of absolute mediation requires being as the mediation of Absolute Nothingness, and this is applicable to the relation of religion and politics in that religion as the faith in the Absolute is to be mediated by the state existence as the content of political practice based upon the social substratum. This is because the purpose of practice is to participate in the salvific edification of other individual existences in cooperation with the returning love of God or mercy of the Buddha. While the affirmative phase of the practice is the returning activity, the negative one is the socio-political practice. Both phases constitute the content of practice in their mutual mediation. This is the practical mediation of religion and politics. The return of religious love and inter-existential cooperation of mutual edification is the principle of social existence.

Since Absolute Nothingness necessarily mediates being and never emanates it, absolute mediation does not emanate a relative state society as self-determination but mediates the species-like substratum of a state society. This is shown by the primitive society in which religion is socio-political in character. When such a religiosity of the primitive society is disintegrated, however, its negativity is further negated and converted into the transcendental pure land or the Kingdom of God from the mundane world by the religious geniuses. This entails the separation of religion and politics along with the revolution from monarch to democracy. Here separation does not necessarily mean self-estrangement or self-alienation. On the contrary, the dialectic demands mediation on account of separation. Therefore today's politics should be mediated by the returning love of the worldreligion to participate in the salvation of humankind. This, of course, never signifies to deduce politics from religion as a consequence of a direct determination of politics by religion. The mundane social institution is to be determined according to the historical actuality. As the positive practical aspect of actuality is determined through the negation of its historical particularity in the form of absolute actuality *qua* ideality, it is untenable apart from the religious principle of Absolute Nothingness. Through the practice in terms of Absolute Nothingness is the spontaneous freedom of an individual person grounded in religion and subjectified, with the attainment of a mutual identification of the individuality and the totality. Hereby the universality of humankind is realized and manifested in the form of cultural phenomena. The state goes beyond its species-like particularity and participates in the universality of humanity.

The state can transcend its own particular definiteness on the level of species and

go a step further to participate in the universality of humankind, as long as it is a being as mediated by the religious principle of Absolute Nothingness, i.e., a negative existence in the form of being qua nothingness. In other words, it is the expedient or balanced being between the genus-like universality and individuality. The state is not merely an assembly of an infinite number of individual persons. But it aims at unification of the states, i.e., a worldly unity, as the self-manifestation of the religious principle of Absolute Nothingness through the practice of absolute negation of the state particularity. *In concreto*, whereas space is always a limited area, time refers to unification through conversion in history, brought about by the political constructive practice of the state or a union of states, mediated by the limited space. A union of plural states is to be directed towards a unification of the world from the religious standpoint of Absolute Negation. This represents the concrete practice by which politics and religion are to be unified through conversion in negation in a higher dimension.

The state is only negatively mediated to the universality of humankind as the content of politico-religious practice, and hence can retain its existence as the balance between being and nothingness, arising from the conversion at each moment. It may maintain its negative mediation in the form of relativity qua absoluteness, that is, solely as the reformative content continuously renewed in practice. Even if so, however, the state requires itself as the juridical state to be governed according to the universal norms of laws in order to preserve its relative absoluteness. In analogy to the mediating role of species tending to be universalized in the objective being as the eternal Idea or Form, the state has the tendency of universalizing itself as the legal system in the affirmative aspect of its negative mediation. Based upon the principle of negativity in the form of being *qua* nothingness, as a result of requiring being as the mediation, the state cannot help but tend to become a substratum as the self-identical being on its own. Here is the tendency towards a juridical perpetuation of the state, i.e., the possibility of degenerating into the unmediated immediate existence, in spite of its negative mediating nature. This is because the state on the level of species, too, is deeply involved in radical evil, clinging to its own self-identity of being apart from its perpetually self-negating conversion in action, as in the case of individual persons. This is the reason why the state existence as such might be evil from the religious perspective. It is parallel to the fact that human beings are inevitably involved in evil. Therefore the state may also acquire its mediative being in the form of the relative *qua* the absolute only through the religious redemption, i.e., through repentance for its radical evil. The state and religion are set in opposition to each other, nevertheless, they are mutually converted in negation and unified through mediation dialectically. The relation of the state to religion should be metanoetically understood in paradox. In the end, Tanabe asserts that today's politics on a worldwide scale should participate in the salvation of humankind through the mediation of the rewarding love of the world religion that is to be ideally realized as a result of a mutual transformation of Buddhism and Christianity.¹

¹ *Ibid.*, pp.361–362.

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