

Nishida on the Problem of the Religious and the Secular

Dennis Stromback

Department of Religion, Temple University

Abstract: *Nishida Kitarō's view of religion (shūkyō 宗教), as both an epistemological standpoint and as an ontological category, can be read as a form of resistance against the totalizing functions of the secular as theorized within European modernity. Unlike European modernity, which positioned religion on the side of delusion and superstition, Nishida believes that the defining logic of religion, a logic of affirmation qua negation, constitutes the structure of historical creativity, and therefore, a necessary vector for personal and cultural transformation. What I will show in this paper is how Nishida problematizes the European notion of the secular as a universal category by putting forth a view of the global world that depends on the logic of religion for its development. Nishida argues that secularization within European history seeks to transcend religious traditions and heritages and to shift the historical world in the direction of scientific rationality. But in the drift towards secularism, as Nishida argues, is the foreclosure of religion as a mode of inquiry that could otherwise bring the particulars of the historical world into what he calls a 'world-historical standpoint' (sekaishiteki tachiba 世界史的立場)—a global world where this is a proliferation of cultural, ethnic, and individual differences that exist dialogically, without any consolidated core or center. The implication of Nishida's critique of the secular standpoint is that if religion remains subordinate to the secular in a global world, then there is no possibility for this unity-in-diversity, there is only the de facto universalization of European categories and logic, which can set the stage for another cycle of European colonialism.*

Introduction

The intellectual pressures of the secular within European modernity to discard religion in favor of purer scientific accounts of historical reality affected how Nishida would view the development of a global world. Not unlike Kant and Hegel,

who sought to resist the totalizing functions of the secular by making room for religion in the modern period, Nishida also would seek to manage the tensions of the secular-religion divide, but more in the service of re-asserting religion as a logic that structures the formation of what he calls the “world-historical standpoint” (*sekaishiteki tachiba* 世界史的立場). It is true that while Nishida did not have all that much to say about what we call the secular or about how it fits into the dialectics of historical life, in Nishida’s “The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview” (1945) (*Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* 場所的論理と宗教的世界観),¹ one can find a few passages where he begins to think about the problem of the secular as a universal category or a universal standpoint. The argument that is advanced in *Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* is that a celebration of the secular carries within itself an intellectual foundation of rationality that has this tendency to reify itself, and therefore universalize its own standpoint, while negating religion and thus deny an opportunity for the cultures, races, or ethnicities of the historical world to realize their own self-contradictory identity and to assert themselves on a global scale. In other words, Nishida’s argues against a universalization of the secular because a world-historical formation based on a secular standpoint would foreclose religion as a logic that could liberate each cultural particular from its own parochialism and to move the historical world toward a more inclusive, pluralistic, and cosmopolitan space.

Nishida’s Influence: The Hegelian Resistance to the Religion-Secular Binary

The way Nishida formulates the problem of the secular-religion binary can be traced back to Hegel—who, not unlike Nishida, did not think of the age of Enlightenment as the pinnacle of creative and intellectual thought. In fact, Hegel saw the Enlightenment period as far too extreme in its projection of religion, because it held a crude representation of religious consciousness. What Hegel argued was that the Enlightenment thinkers instead relegated faith to the image of a cult following superstitious and magical rituals to invoke the presence of a divine. Within the context of Enlightenment rationality, religious belief was viewed as the opposite of reason, and as such, thought of as something that must be driven out of

¹ Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David Dilworth (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii, 1987).

the collective consciousness.² Therefore, the committed effort to fix the errors and self-delusion of religious consciousness, if anything, exemplifies the arrogance and hostility of Enlightenment rationality. Here, Hegel points to how the notion of absolute freedom, as manifested in Robespierre's fury of destruction within the French Revolution, represents the vulgarity and violence of an ahistorical and abstract reason that misunderstands itself.³

Hegel conceded that the Enlightenment critique of religious belief was not completely unfounded though either. The practice of faith within religious consciousness has indeed failed to provide external evidence for much of its beliefs, and so if faith results in putting too much trust in some doctrine or creed, then the power of religious beliefs crumble in the face of any empirical evidence that contradicts its worldview.⁴ But how does Hegel continue the spin of the dialectic if both religious belief and Enlightenment rationality are not sufficient in themselves to move towards a higher synthesis? Hegel reasoned that in order to reach the absolute one must sublimate the opposing contradictions into a new level of thought that incorporates aspects of the other. This means that reconciliation between opposing contradictions is possible only by saving certain ideals of each opposing consciousness. Thus, in terms of overcoming the religion-secular divide, Hegel believed that the ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—can only be recuperated if reason is situated within the frame of God. The same is true on the other end as well: religious consciousness can be rescued from the assault of reason if it were to adopt a more philosophical outlook.⁵ Since Hegel rejected Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, the goal of the dialectic becomes not so much a negation of one form over another, to avoid being challenged on grounds of being a contradictory form, but rather a unification of the opposites in a way that captures the 'missing relata' in each sphere of thought. In order to reach the end of the dialectic then, Hegel's logical synthesis via 'negativity of negativity' becomes the content that was masked in the representation of the other.

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. AV Miller (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 329–330.

³ Jürgen Stolzenberg, "Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment in 'The Struggle of the Enlightenment with Superstition'", in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Kenneth Westphal (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 204.

⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 337–338, 577–578.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 348–349.

But why does each structure of consciousness fall short in constituting the totality of spirit? Or why does each consciousness conceal some aspect of reality? The answer Hegel provided was in the notion of alienation. While the engine of creative development resides in the experience of alienation, if there is too much, self-deception takes place. In fact, Hegel argued that the self-deception of the Enlightenment emerges in its casting of religion as a foreign consciousness: in its characterization of reason, the Enlightenment fools itself into thinking that it is autonomous from the delusion of religious faith instead of realizing that it is its inverted mirror image. As Hegel explains:

. . . here Enlightenment is foolish; faith regards it as not knowing what it is saying, and not understanding the real facts when it talks about priestly deception and deluding the people. It talks about this as if by some hocus-pocus of conjuring priests consciousness had been palmed off with something absolutely *alien* and ‘*other*’ to it in place of its own essence. . . ⁶

What Hegel is suggesting here is that to overcome this self-deception, the Enlightenment itself must recognize its own relationship to religion—not as an expression of antagonism but as an expression of each consciousness subsuming the other. God is not separate from the world, but conceived as immanent within the world, revealing itself within nature and history.⁷

Hegel’s attempt to overcome the secular-religious divide tells us a little bit about the philosophical terminology Nishida was playing with, given the influence Hegel had on Nishida’s dialectical thought. One serious difference between the dialectics deployed by both Hegel and Nishida that needs to be pointed out here is that Nishida would convert Hegel’s dialectical method from a process of temporalized synthesis that moves into a higher, elevated form of self-awareness to a process of affirmation *qua* negation where the interrelations of autonomous opposites determine themselves through mutual self-negation—a system of logic Nishida scholars now call “place dialectics”. Thus, the absolute for Nishida is not a linear totality that moves beyond opposing determinations by subsuming them, as it is for Hegel, but a process of infinite deepening among all the opposing expressions in relationship—as a kind of “dialectical unity-in-opposition” if you will. In view of this difference in the dialectical formation, one is able to see that Nishida does

⁶ Ibid., 335.

⁷ Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 142–146.

not agree with Hegel's push to "unite" reason and religion in the movement towards a more self-aware history, because such a configuration fails to consider the place that structures the infinite self-contradictions comprising the process of historical creativity. Like Hegel, Nishida would situate all creative formations—artistic, moral, or rational—within a God that is the ground of all reality, but the movement towards self-awareness in the "unity" of self and God does not consist of a scaffolding made up of stools that allows one to peek through the eyes of God, it is a return to the primordial awareness of self *qua* God as a contradictory identity through the very act of uncovering oneself as living and dying as God, and vice versa. In this regard, Nishida would claim that Hegel's dialectical logic does not go far enough in rendering a historical reality that is constituted through the act of self-negation. The overcoming of the problem of the secular-religion divide then is not a problem of "historical necessity", where progress depends on sublating opposites to obtain a view of reality that is free from rational errors, thus accepting the rational base of the secular as the end point in the dialectic.⁸ The problem is one of "existential necessity", where seeing and thinking reality as clearly as possible depends on seeing oneself as an absolute contradictory form. Now how Nishida problematizes the secular as a universal category and seeks to overcome the binary through this dialectical logic is what I will discuss next.

Nishida Critique of Secular Standpoint

To get a sense of how Nishida problematizes the secular standpoint, we must clarify his notion of religion. Throughout his early writings, as well as into the middle years, Nishida referenced religion as a logic of awareness that is more concrete than scientific objectivity because it has greater immediacy to the real. It is no coincidence then, as Nishida would suggest, that the logic of self-awareness embodies the same logic that articulates the dialectical structure of historical reality—what Nishida would describe in his later years as the 'logic of absolute contradictory identity'. In Nishida's last major writing though, this view of religion as both an epistemological standpoint and an ontological category becomes crystallized, where God becomes framed as this incarnated logic of contradictory self-identity expressed in and as historical life. Here, Nishida is referring to God

⁸ Espen Hammer, "Hegel as a Theorist of Secularization", in *Hegel Bulletin* 34, 2 (2013): 223–224.

not as an absolute being that transcends the universe, as found in much of Christianity, but rather as a dialectical relationship between a dynamic ultimate and the spiritual events that reaches the soul of the particular. What this means is that God expresses itself in the everyday life, as part of the experienced reality, and that the particular, as a subject living and dying in the historical world, “always encounters the absolute as the paradox of God himself—as the self-negation of the absolute One”.⁹ To put it another way, there is a point of convergence within the infinite depth of religious awareness where there is no distinction between self and God living and dying. Within this context one can see how Nishida positions religion as not so much a confession of faith or belief in a divine being or beings, especially since God, as a kind of metaphor for the dynamic structure of historical life, can never transcend the world, because God is always an expression of the world-in-becoming. Hence Nishida would say that God is “neither theism, nor deism, neither spiritualism nor naturalism; it is historical”,¹⁰ and that “the more the self is a consciously active individual, the more it faces God”.¹¹

For Nishida, God, as an incarnated logic of contradictory self-identity, means that the realization of self *qua* God works in the manner of absolute negation. This is because a true absolute cannot be anything other than that which contain its own self-negation. If an absolute merely transcends the relative, or merely negates relative nothingness, then it is not a true absolute. Such an absolute becomes only an abstraction. But if God relates to itself in the form of self-contradiction, then the negation of this relative nothingness opens one up to the place of absolute nothing, a place of self-seeing or self-mirroring that brings forth more self-awareness of the historical world, because “God must possess negation within himself in order to express himself”.¹² The point of structuring religion as an epistemological and ontological logic of contradictory identity instantiates Nishida’s justification for deploying religion as a proper critique. That is to say, if religion is paradoxical in structure, then Kant’s object-logic or Aristotle’s grammatical subject fall short in being able to grasp and clarify the transformative logic of affirmation *qua* negation that is articulated in the principles of religion. The central task within generating a philosophical standpoint, as Nishida believes, is to begin from a stance that places the logic of religion as the structural and existential foundation for all historical

⁹ Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, 95.

¹⁰ James Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 102.

¹¹ Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, 95.

¹² *Ibid.*, 71.

creativity—only at that point is it clear that divorcing religion from any facet of historical life is not only problematic, but an impossibility.

Nishida's logic of historical creativity not only refers to the creative formations of the world in the intellectual and artistic sense, but to the religiosity of the historical world as well. Nishida suggests as such when he says, "insofar as the self is a historical reality born from the historical world, acting in the historical world, and dying to the historical world, it must be religious. We should speak in this way in respect of the ground of the self".¹³ On one hand, Nishida is resisting a compartmentalization of society and religion and/or history and religion, because "every historically crystallized society begins from a religious ground",¹⁴ and so "every historical epoch is religious in its ground",¹⁵ but on the other hand, Nishida is also clarifying the "ontological relationship" between society and religion, because in one aspect of things, religion should be understood as part of everything humans do. But not everything can be described as religious as such, because while everyone is implaced in the world of the absolute, as part of the creative expression(s) of God, not all actions are reducible or leads to what Nishida describes as religious experience or religious awareness. The deepest of the religious forms, as Nishida describes it, arises more in the awareness of historical life as this practice of self-negation. In other words, self-determination always begins from one's action-intuition implaced in the social historical world; and while all insight into one's formation of self-awareness is to some extent religious, because the ground of historical creativity is an expression of the absolute spirit, it is not necessarily the deepest form of uncovering the religiosity of the historical world. Rather, the deepest religious insight one can have derives more from what Nishida calls 'inverse correspondence'—this relational revealment of self and God through mutual self-negation, where God is realized only in the death of the ego, or in the death of the self. What Zen calls "seeing into one's true nature" is part of this confrontation with God *qua* this awareness of selflessness, and it is in this mutual self-negation of self and God where there is a transformation of the self and an uncovering of religion in historical life.¹⁶

But how does this relate to the problem of the secular standpoint? The context in which the term secularism first arises within Nishida's *Bashoteki ronri to*

¹³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴ Ibid., 116.

¹⁵ Ibid., 98.

¹⁶ John Krummel. "The Originary Wherein: Heidegger and Nishida on 'the Sacred' and 'the Religious,'" in *Research in Phenomenology* 40, 3 (2010): 394.

shūkyōteki sekaikan was in a discussion around Western modernity and its vision of a global world. According to Nishida, modern European culture identified secularization as a form of progress, and within the process of secularization, there was a re-casting of the national, racial, and cultural identity within Europe. But what this seems to mean for Nishida is that the process of secularization demanded a renunciation of old religious traditions, in favor of moving towards a universalization of scientific discourse as the ideal mode of inquiry for shaping the intellectual landscape of the global world. Nishida writes:

In the dawn of history, the human world was predominantly spatial. The races existed in spatial contemporaneity, or merely side by side, as it were. The world of the absolute present, dormant in its temporal axis, was not self-transforming and the human world was not yet world-historical. . . . In that instance, the old worlds lose their specific traditions, become anti-individual, abstractly universal, anti-religious, and scientific. We see this process of secularization in the “progress” of modern European culture. As an absolute’s affirmation through its own negation, such a negative moment contributes to the direction of the world’s transformation.¹⁷

As argued here, the secularization that took root in European modernity sets the stage to view the world in an abstract universal language that uses scientific discourse to position itself against religion—a point Nishida also discusses earlier in the essay:

Indeed, some philosophers even pride themselves in taking a contrary position. Religion, they say, is unscientific and illogical, or at most something subjectively mystical. . . . Religion, we are told, is a kind of narcotic. . . . However, even though I do not consider myself competent to speak about religion to others, I cannot follow those who say they do not understand religion because it is unscientific and illogical.¹⁸

Nishida is claiming that while Western secularism had thought of itself as having ‘transcended’, progressed, or moved beyond its own particular historical determination in the shift towards a global world, the reality is that Western

¹⁷ Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, 117.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

secularism is just a superficial realization, because it is merely a particular assuming itself to be a universal. In this regard, there is nothing truly special about Western secularism, because it is only a historical particular, among many others.

The other point that Nishida is making here is that leaving tradition and religion on the shelves of history become an act of determination that masks one's own religious history. This is because while the old world (here, meaning religious traditions) that did form part of the modern European world was negated in the secular formation, it never stopped playing a role in its constitution, since underlying the secular standpoint is the logic of religion as its structural foundation. Nishida writes: "But the absolute does not transcend the relative. . . . And therefore the negation of the old worlds is included within the historical world's self-formative development".¹⁹ That is, Nishida argues that if the basis of all creative formations within historical reality is religion, then the secular as well reproduces the religious structure grounding the historical world. To put it another way, while modern European culture has told the story to itself that it had generated a scientific culture in order to overcome its primitive or religious past, what is ultimately obscured in this story is how science itself, as another creative formation in the world, is actually religious in its foundation. As Nishida writes:

But the world of science is still a human product, even as a form of the historical world's self-negation. Therefore science is also a form of culture. . . . In religious language, it is the fact that God sees himself through his own self-negation. In this sense the world of science may also be said to be religious. Kepler's astronomy, for example, is said to have been religious in inspiration.²⁰

But while science is religion, religion is not exclusively science. This is because there is a self-deception that underlies the desire for transcendence within the scientific pursuit, because "from the abstractly theoretical standpoint of scientific discourse, God possesses himself through self-negation", and so "we can also speak, in Hegel's terms, of the world of the spirit that is alienated from itself".²¹ In other words, the alienation baked into the mythology of the secular, in the story that it

¹⁹ Ibid., 117–118.

²⁰ Ibid., 118.

²¹ Ibid., 118.

tells itself that it has overcome the problem of religion, functions as this self-deception, because it disguises the place from which science emerges.

But in the very disguising of this ground is where the heart of the problem begins to emerge, because the logic of religion, as a necessary mode for personal and cultural transformation, remains invisible in this narrative. According to Nishida, a more historically aware world order is one where the content of God's own self-affirmation becomes uncovered through self-negation, where there is a mutual revealment of culture and religion to the point of knowing that a "true culture must be religious and [a] true religion must be cultural".²² Here, Nishida is not suggesting a conflation of culture and religion, where both melt into each other as such, leaving no distinctions behind, nor is this a frame that secretly prioritizes one category over the other, where religion negates culture or where culture negates religion, leaving one of the categories in a privileged position. Instead, one can read this relationship within Nishida's logic of religion, this logic that confers the self-realization of cultural history from within the standpoint of religious awareness as an absolutely contradictory identity. In other words, as the basis of cultural realization that can move each particular towards a world-historical standpoint is religion as the self-contradictory logic of affirmation *qua* negation, immanence *qua* transcendence, and/or one *qua* many, because in order to arrive at a more self-aware view of itself in the historical world, one must express themselves culturally through the religious standpoint of self-negation, and not allow for a singular religion to negate culture, like the way Hegel's philosophy allowed for a slippage of the Christian view of God to operate as the ontological structure of history.²³

Keep in mind that in this movement towards a world-historical standpoint, Nishida argues that it is not the nation-states themselves that must take the lead, but rather the multiplicity of cultures that make up the historical world.²⁴ In fact, as early as in *Zen no Kenkyu* (1911) (善の研究), Nishida puts forth the case that the nation-state is not the final goal of a particular's historical and ethical mission, but is rather a transitional development, until something greater is realized.²⁵ Therefore, the nation-state is merely a vehicle for a cultural particular to realize, articulate, and express its "true personality"—or, rather, its "ethical mission" in the global world. It is clear from this stance then, unlike the secular view that discourages religion from participating in the affairs of the nation-state, the logic of religion should

²² Ibid., 118.

²³ In fact, Hegel believed that Christianity, in particular, represents the highest form of religious awareness. Robert Stern, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 191.

²⁴ Feenberg, "Experience and Culture: Nishida's Path 'To the Things Themselves'", 41.

²⁵ Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, *Zen no Kenkyu* 善の研究 (Nagoya 名古屋: Chisokudō Publications, 2016), 140–141.

inform and structure the moral politics of the nation-state as it transitions towards a global world. In this regard, Nishida positions the operations of the nation-state within the structural logic of religion. While a distinction must be made between a nation-state and religion because a nation-state alone cannot liberate its own citizens, in the end though, the nation-state must act in accordance to the logic of religion, functioning only as the moral figurehead of its citizens. As Nishida writes:

Each nation is a world that contains the self-expression of the absolute within itself. . . . In this sense, the nation is religious. The form of the historical world's self-formation that is religious in its ground is that of the nation. Yet I do not say that the nation itself is the absolute. The nation is the fountainhead of morality, but not of religion. As the nation is a form of the absolute's own self-formation, our moral actions must reflect a national character; but the nation does not save our souls. The true nation has its ground in the religious. A religious person, in his moral behavior, must naturally be a citizen of a nation as something historically formative. And yet the two standpoints must always be distinguished as well. If they are not, the pure development of each, religion and morality, will be obstructed, regressing into the "medieval" identity of the two.²⁶

Nishida is suggesting that the logic of religion embeds the public sphere by framing and shaping the moral sensibility of a particular culture through the guide of the nation-state. But a culture that seeks to fully realize itself morally is one that self-negates, which is why in the end a "true nation has its ground in the religious".

Finally, Nishida warns not to return to a view of religion from the standpoint of rationality, which has historically relegated religion as a vector for self and moral transformation. This is because, if a modern, global world negates religion in favor of a secular standpoint, then humanity, the world, and so on, is at risk of losing a "true self" within the entire process. Nishida writes:

When mankind, however, maximizes the human standpoint in a non-religious form, in a purely secular fashion, the result is that the world negates itself, and mankind loses itself. This has been the trend of European culture since the Renaissance, and the reason that such a thing as the decline and fall of the West has been proclaimed.²⁷

²⁶ Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, 122.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

But what is particularly concerning Nishida here is the universalization of the secular standpoint, of the “non-religious form”, because it leaves no room for the development of a “true culture”—meaning, a culture that encourages its own historical self-awakening. In the same paragraph, Nishida writes:

When the world loses itself and the human beings come to forget God, mankind becomes boundlessly individual and selfish. The world then becomes mere play or struggle, and the possibility of a true culture is undermined. The condition of mere secular culture ultimately loses all sense of true culture.²⁸

This raises issues for the future: that is, if religion is foreclosed and the secular is universalized, then there is no road to a “global culture”, or a formation of cultures that form what Nishida calls a “world-historical standpoint” (*sekaishiteki tachiba* 世界史的立場). This is because the resuscitation of reason at the expense of the logic of religion embodies the risk of reifying the self and world as objects outside each other. The “world then becomes mere play or struggle” because, from the standpoint of this subject-object binary, the world becomes viewed as something that conflicts with the self vis-à-vis something that the self is co-immanent with. Instead of self-negation operating as the point of departure into one’s self-awareness, a secular culture starts from the position of cathection, where the atomized self (the particular) is converted into an object that must be protected from the struggle of existence. The world from this viewpoint becomes seen as a world of conflict, a world of “rational competition”. In short, there is a creative loss in the universalization of the secular, because instead of truly learning from one another, the self reifies itself and the culture it belongs to, and then begins to privilege its own standpoint above all else.

By no means should one interpret Nishida as a reactionary, nor a romantic, inviting a return to the Middle Ages, because of his friendly posturing towards religion. In fact, Nishida argues that while history is cyclical by nature, the creative formations of the historical world cannot repeat themselves in any objective way, and so every arising historical moment is a new creation. Contemporarily speaking then, since the modern period is unique and particular, in that its development had arose of the Middle Ages out of historical necessity, there is no reason to advocate

²⁸ Ibid.

for anything other than for the creation of a new cultural direction in the world to come. As Nishida writes:

It is not possible to return to the standpoint of medieval culture; nor can medieval culture be the factor that saves modern culture. A new cultural direction has now to be sought. A new mankind must be born. . . . In other words, we advance in the direction that sees God as self-negation. But to move in a merely immanent human direction would again result in the world's losing itself and mankind's negating itself. I thus maintain that we must proceed by the logic of absolutely contradictory identity—that is, of transcending immanently. This immanent transcendence is the road to a new global culture.²⁹

Instead, Nishida is hoping that the global world aims to “advance in the direction that sees God as self-negation,” where historical life sees the foundation of the real as immanently transcendent and as inherently self-contradictory. Only then can the particulars of a historical reality are able to truly realize itself as part of a world that is less parochial than what came before, a global world, if you will, where each particular seeks to carry out its own ethical mission, so that a world-system of mutual differences and co-relativity can be found and maintained.

Conclusion: Religion in the Global World

What I tried to show in this paper was how Nishida seeks to resist secularization as a universal standpoint or universal category by deploying the logic of religion as the structural basis for a global world. When Nishida was motivated to search for a logic of historical creativity that transcends the particulars of East and West—in order to dissolve the East-West dichotomy, the task was to locate a deeper and broader ground of logic that could operate as the source for all creative forms and beings of historical reality. This logic (of *topos*), what Nishida would eventually call the logic of *basho* (場所), would be resistant to reification and thus immune to any attempt at building a hierarchy of cultures. This is why the scientific standpoint, as part of the secular formation, cannot be viewed as an inherently superior mode of realization, because the logic of *basho* gives other traditional and cultural values

²⁹ Ibid., 120.

a non-subordinate place within intellectual history.³⁰ Without the logic of *basho* functioning as the structural logic of all things, beings, and forms, the tendency would then be to universalize one's own cultural and intellectual particular. This is what happened with the history of the Western particular, a point Nishida discusses rather briefly in the essay "The Problem of Japanese Culture" (1938) (*Nihon Bunka no Mondai* 日本文化の問題):

European culture, deriving from a Greek culture which was intellectual and theoretical in character and dedicated to an inquiry into true fact, has a great theoretical structure behind it, on the basis of which European scholars criticize different cultures and frictions among the various cultures for several thousand years, a certain theoretical archetype has been developed, which Europeans consider the one and only cultural archetype. On this basis they conceive of stages of cultural development, in terms of which Oriental culture is seen as still lingering in an undeveloped stage. Oriental culture must, if developed, become identical with the Occidental one, they believe. Even such a great thinker as Hegel shared this view. But I think a problem arises here.³¹

The implication here is that a cultural hierarchy begins when one assumes a universal where there is only a particular. In the case of the Western standpoint, the Orient was subordinated to Western cultural history because of the Western particular thinking of itself as "the one and only cultural archetype".

As a concluding thought, I want to show how Nishida's critique of the secular standpoint helps us understand what a logic of colonialism or a logic of imperialism might look like in the historical world. Thus far, I tried to argue in this paper that Nishida's problematization of the secular is in part an attempt to save the concept of religion from being swallowed up by Western logic. But what is implied in this insertion of religion as the basis for a global world (*sekaiteki sekai* 世界的世界) is that the ethical mission of a particularity, in order for it to realize a deeper historical identity, must be motivated to resist the reproduction of cultural, racial, and intellectual exclusion. Otherwise, any imposition of a universal onto a particular already puts forth the beginning of a new colonial order. In other words, since all cultures are historical and particularized, a global world founded on a

³⁰ Salja Graupe, "The Locus of Science and its Place in Japanese Culture: Nishida on the Relationship of Science and Culture," in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* 6, ed. James Heisig (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2006), Kindle edition, 2103.

³¹ Nishida Kitarō, "The Problem of Japanese Culture", in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, ed. Ryusaku Tsunoda, Donald Keene, and William Theodore de Bary and trans. Masao Abe (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1958).

universalization of a particular represents a mission to colonialize, because it serves as an event of a singular that negates the other, instead of advancing as a process of mutual self-negation. This is where we see how Nishida argues for how a world of philosophical, ethnic, and cultural diversity, as a kind of inclusion of differentiation, can only really exist as the outcome of particulars realizing their own self-contradictory identities, because the historical world becomes less superficially realized only when each particular seeks to realize themselves via negating themselves. The negation of oneself is not just a renunciation of the desire to dominate the entire political scene, it is a negation of the other's desire for imperialism and aggression in the world. The nuances of this point can be seen in Nishida's discussion of the co-prosperity sphere:

It [co-prosperity sphere] is definitely not imperialism. For it to be a co-prosperity sphere, everyone in the sphere must be satisfied. If [Japan] arbitrarily decided on the nature of the sphere and if it coerced the other members, that would violate the free will of all the regions [including Japan]. That would not be a co-prosperity sphere. If it were a true co-prosperity sphere, others would ask Japan to create it for them. If that is not the case, we cannot talk of a Holy War.³²

The implication of Nishida's discussion here is that if the principle of self-negation is followed all the way through within each particular, then there is no need for anyone to stifle the desire to assert dominance anyways. Ultimately, the ethical mission of a particular is really to maintain a consistent openness in the encounter of the other, an openness that is dialogical and transformative, with an aim to warn against any form of dogmatism that may creep into one's initial position.³³ Thus, as Christopher Goto-Jones tell us, Nishida believes that one must always begin with critique instead of forcing a particular to be universalized, and so in this sense, any movement towards a global awakening depends on a cultural transformation that is more evolutionary vis-à-vis revolutionary.³⁴

Here, one can see that Nishida's idea of a global world is based on the realization of the cooperative inter-relationships between particular worlds

³² Christopher Goto-Jones, "Ethics and Politics in the Early Nishida: Reconsidering Zen no Kenkyu," *Philosophy East and West* 53, 4 (2003): 529.

³³ Nishida's notion of '*basho*' is operative here—that the un-delimited place of existence and activity of self-negation also serves as the foundation of global co-existence and the process of de-totalization. That mutual self-negation between each region, ethnicity, and nationality is located within this groundless ground of affirmation *qua* negation—the mark of religious character as Nishida reminds us. John Krummel, *Nishida Kitarō's Chiasmatic Chorology: Place of Dialectic, Dialectic of Place* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 218–221.

³⁴ Christopher-Goto Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 92–94.

(*tokushuteki sekai* 特殊の世界) or co-prosperity worlds in a way that acts to preclude absolute closure, colonialism, and/or the domination of others.³⁵ This is because Nishida believes that it is necessary that at the base of the world-historical standpoint is a world-of-worlds, where each particular (*qua* nationality, ethnicity, race, individual) exists as its own center at every point, realizing itself in order to meet the needs of all.³⁶ From this vantage point then, Nishida's philosophical viewpoint is about possibility, because it is in part a vision about what a future world would look like if there were alternative views or logics of historical creativity that are irreducible to the secular modernity of the West. This is because the secular standpoint is just one standpoint among many other standpoints—alongside the various religions of the world for instance—in the drift towards shaping the philosophical and cultural contours of the global world. Now if Nishida is correct about the problem of the secular as a universal category, then any real dialogue that could be enacted on a global scale would become an impossibility, because of the historical inclination within the secular to characterize religion as a 'pre-scientific' or 'unscientific' category. What becomes smuggled in through the secular standpoint as a result is Western logic as a prioritized frame of thought. If this bears any implication on a logic of colonialism, then the idea is that even the secular standpoint carries the tendency to reify and universalize itself within itself, creating another encounter of a colonial order, because it does not emphasize self-negation enough to the point of absolute self-contradiction. In this sense, if there is to be a proper global world that is without a colonial impulse, then there must be a reclaiming of religion and religious awareness as a logic of contradictory identity as part of the trajectory of historical awareness, as opposed to discarding it.

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³⁵ Krummel, *Nishida Kitarō's Chiasmatic Chorology: Place of Dialectic, Dialect of Place*, 223.

³⁶ Goto-Jones, "Ethics and Politics in the Early Nishida: Reconsidering Zen no Kenkyu," 527.

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