

CHAPTER FIVE



“Evolutionary Theory Is the Superstition of Modernity”

In 1942, after the fall of Singapore, the victorious general Yamashita Tomoyuki (1885–1946)—the “Tiger of Malaya”—held a speech to muster the support of the Chinese residents. He “concluded that the Japanese were descended from the gods, the Europeans, as fully explained by Darwin, from the monkeys. In the war between gods and monkeys, there could be only one victor.”¹ Yamashita was probably not joking. Many propagandists, supported by the military, promoted the idea of the descent of the Japanese people, and especially the emperor, from the Shintō gods. Not much later, however, Tokugawa Yoshichika (1886–1987), an eccentric descendant of the Shogunal family and a biologist, came to Singapore as a special advisor, and took control of the Raffles Museum and the botanical gardens. There, he worked together with E. H. J. Corner, a British biologist. He even sent one of Corner’s books to Emperor Hirohito, whom he knew personally. Hirohito, the “living god” in whose name the war was waged, was also a passionate biologist. In his private laboratory, he even had a bust of Charles Darwin. But the image of the emperor as scientist was now all but concealed from his public appearance. During the late 1930s, the ideological and religious identity of evolutionary theory had shifted and became much more charged and widely disputed.

Japan during the late 1920s and 1930s experienced the shock of economic crisis, a polarization of Left and Right amidst a wider loss of confidence in parliamentary democracy and the international monetary and legal system. After Japan’s takeover of Manchuria in 1931, Japan gradually became more internationally isolated. A new generation of nationalist activists thought the road to modernization since 1868 might have been mistaken, and accused

the Western powers of never having accepted Japan as an equal, and Tokyo's elites as complacent and corrupt. Many nationalists advocated military rule and a return to original Shintō spiritual values; they deplored and feared the influence of Marxism as well as Western cultural influences. Some resorted to terrorism and carried out a series of attempted coup d'états. During the 1930s, with each international crisis, the military gradually took on more powers, and promoted *kokutai* ideology and emperor worship. The demonstrable need to propagate these ideas shows how concerned the nationalists and the military were about the state of Japanese society. This period was still, right up to the day of Pearl Harbor, also the age of modernism, Jazz, Hollywood movies, 'decadence', and consumer culture.

During the 1930s, a current of vocal Shintō-inspired activists and ideologues, and even members of the government, rose in opposition to evolutionary theory. Even among those intellectuals who tried to harmonize religion and science, there was a marked opposition to the theory of natural selection—an opposition with religiously inspired motivations. How should we understand this rise of antievolutionary religious thought that emerged decades after the introduction of evolutionary theory to Japan and the effort of so many intellectuals to harmonize evolution with religion? And what does it tell us about the religious and ideological world of Japan in the 1930s and 1940s?

MARXISM, BIOLOGY, AND ATHEISM

During the 1920s, after the establishment of the Comintern, the polarization worldwide between ideas on the Left and the Right intensified. Although the Japanese Communist Party, founded in 1922, was banned, and "altering the *kokutai*" or "the system of private property" was outlawed under the Public Security Preservation Law of 1925, Marxist and socialist ideas and movements continued to exert a huge role in the world of ideas, especially among intellectuals and students. Since, as we saw, the Japanese Left had to a large degree succeeded in pulling evolutionary theory to the left, the continuous influence of Marxism and the reaction by Japanese ideologues against the Left were crucial factors for the rise of antievolutionary thought in Japan. The rise of the Soviet Union, an officially atheist state, its efforts to dismantle religion, and its leaders' hailing of Darwinism as the basis of "scientific atheism" had raised the stakes.² In Japan, there had been a number of voices, although limited in number, who explicitly positioned evolutionary theory against the national myths. In 1924, for example, a certain Kobayashi Kyūji stressed that evolution explains who our ancestors are: animals, plants, and protozoans. The Japanese people (*minzoku*), he wrote, also

came from animal ancestors, and came to Japan via India, Burma, and China. "What is often said, that the Japanese people descended from the Heavenly Reed Plain [Takamagahara] and are children of the gods, is nothing but a myth. There is no Heavenly Reed Plain, since it is just the place name for Hyūga in Kyūshū, where the first Japanese came to Japan. Like the Christian Garden of Eden, it is a fantasy."³ Kobayashi was an obscure figure and we do not know what impact this book made (which was probably self-published). Nevertheless, over time, the existence of sentiments like these would draw the ire from the religious Right.

Starting in 1931, a number of Marxist and atheist antireligious movements such as the Han shūkyō tōsō dōmei (Alliance for Antireligion Combat), the Nihon sentōteki mushinronsha dōmei (Japan Militants Atheist Alliance), and the Nihon hanshūkyō dōmei (Japanese Antireligion Alliance) sprang up and held rallies, distributed antireligious leaflets, and under the banner of class struggle, spread the idea of religion as the "opium of the people," with calls to "liberate all working masses from all forms of religion, and to gain a Marxist-Leninist worldview."⁴ They followed the Soviet Union, where in 1929 the League of Militant Atheists had been formed, reclaiming Lenin's atheist message, and vocally advocated the destruction of religion.⁵

Openly calling for the dismantling of State Shintō and the religiosity surrounding the emperor being illegal under the Public Security Preservation Law, these movements implicitly targeted the *kokutai* ideology and State Shintō when they criticized religion as supportive of bourgeois society and the ruling class, and advocated atheism. In practice, they more vocally targeted Buddhism and Christianity, not least because the largest Buddhist and Christian organizations were by now officially loyal to the emperor system and the *kokutai*. Buddhists began to speak of an "Imperial Way Buddhism" (*kōdōbukkō*), in effect, as recent historians argue, turning Buddhism into a supporting component of State Shintō.⁶ The Great Congratulatory Memorial Japan Religions Conference held in 1928 by leaders of the Buddhist, Christian, and Shintō organizations officially proclaimed that their aim was to support the state, and its "Thought Division" stated that it was the responsibility of religious leaders to exterminate the political position of Marxism, as it opposed the *kokutai*. The rise of the antireligious movements, although short-lived, caused great concern among many people and triggered a response from Buddhist organizations as well as from a range of moderate conservatives who rejected these movements as a ploy by the Comintern to influence Japan.

The antireligious movements advocated a strong version of materialism as a basis for atheism, and found support in evolutionary theory. The Japanese

Antireligion Alliance, for example, published a translation of antireligious texts by Lenin, who evoked Darwin (together with Marx, Feuerbach, and the French materialists) in support for Marxist atheism.⁷ As previously discussed, by no means were all socialists, anarchists, or Marxists atheist or opposed to the *kokutai*, yet the use of evolutionary theory as a weapon against religion by these organizations aggravated the tensions with the *kokutai* ideology that had formed during the Meiji period. For many conservatives, these developments caused or confirmed suspicions that evolutionary biology was potentially a “Red” science, and should be rejected. In 1934, for example, Fukasaka Yasubumi (1874–1962), a professor in ethics, denounced the antireligious movements as a communist attempt to, as they had done in the Soviet Union, destroy the religious institutions of Japan, and stated that their ideas (such as evolutionary theory) were fundamentally incompatible with Japan, since the nation was created by the *kami*.⁸ In short, one aspect of the rise of religious antievolutionary thought in Japan was a manifestation of a wider political polarization and a reaction against real and perceived threats from the Left against the *kokutai* ideology.

But the atheist Left also alarmed moderate conservatives, many of whom, in response, moved closer to positions of the nationalist Right. In the 1930s, for example, the well-known and influential Catholic priest and philosopher Iwashita Sōichi (1889–1940), someone who rejected extreme nationalist tendencies in Japan, criticized “certain well-known scholars of evolutionary theory,” and stated:

through them, materialist evolutionary theory has become widespread in the world of education in Japan. In all primary schools in the country, they are teaching shrine worship and materialist evolutionary theory in the same classroom. As a result, questions like “Teacher, does that mean that the ancestors of Emperor Jinmu were apes?” come from the mouths of innocent children. If that is the case, *although it might be narrow-minded, I think a proposal to prohibit the teaching of evolutionary theory would be advisable.*⁹

We will discuss Iwashita in more detail below, but suffice it to say that Iwashita was no antievolutionist, nor was he actually strongly supportive of the *kokutai* ideology; he preferred the established social and political stability to what he saw as the chaos of the radical atheist Left, and this attachment to stability led him to advocate the abolishment of the teaching of evolutionary theory. In the politically charged interwar era, these concerns were widely shared among conservative segments of society.

In the 1930s, Marxist theorists were indeed further cementing the relation between evolutionary theory and the Left, advocating atheist and materialist

interpretations of evolution as an antidote against what they saw as a rise in fascism and religious conservatism. But they also criticized natural selection theory, and provided alternative and innovative theoretical frameworks for biology. The figure of Darwin himself remained somewhat ambivalent for Marxists. On the one hand, following Marx and Lenin, many Marxists regarded Darwin as an ally in a larger paradigm that explained change in both nature and society according to natural laws, and hailed him as a champion for atheism.¹⁰ But on the other hand, Marxists continued to accuse Darwin's theory of natural selection of being a product of British capitalism and of being an expression of the principle of competition in the free market.¹¹

The group that most elaborately debated the relation between evolutionary theory and Marxism in 1930s Japan was the Yuibutsuron kenkyūkai (Materialism Study Group), abbreviated as Yuiken, founded in 1932. With forty founding members and around one hundred fifty affiliates, Yuiken was an important countercurrent in the intellectual world of the 1930s. Designated a "dangerous thought group" and monitored by the Special Higher Police, after 1937 it became too difficult for the group to operate and it was dissolved, only to reemerge in force after the war.¹² Since Yuiken counted a number of well-respected biologists and philosophers among its ranks, members who were, to a degree, at the cutting edge of biological theory, what they advocated mattered. The Yuiken biologists, including Koizumi Makoto, Ishii Tomoyuki, and Ishihara Tatsurō, translated works from Soviet scientists, and published books on biology aimed at a wide audience to propagate a Marxist message.¹³ By continuing the message that evolutionary theory was naturally materialist, atheist, and an ally of Marxism, Yuiken exerted an indirect but important influence on the history of evolutionary theory and religion in Japan.

Ishii and Ishihara, for example, argued that any reconciliatory attitude with religion weakened evolutionary theory's revolutionary potential and prevented it from becoming a true "proletarian biology."¹⁴ While Ishii and Ishihara mentioned the "antiscientific trends" in Japan, they could not openly attack State Shintō and emperor worship, and such criticism was conspicuously absent in their book. Declaring religion and science as incompatible, and even criticism of Christianity, should be interpreted as veiled critiques of State Shintō and emperor worship. Their biohistorical account of the origin of human society served a similar critical purpose. The dialectical materialist interpretation of early human evolution and society, according to which tools, and therefore labor, had spurred the development of language and social organization ("that labour created man himself"),

also rendered useless any transcendent notion of divine origins or a transhistorical order centered around the emperor.¹⁵

During a time when neovitalist and nonmaterialist theories of biology were on the rise, Yuiken promoted new materialist interpretations of evolutionary theory.¹⁶ They also dismissed all biological theories that were not dialectical materialist (mechanism, vitalism, idealism, and organicism) as “bourgeois.” A materialist interpretation of evolutionary theory could function as a subtle antidote against a rising Shintō nationalism and the discourse of the “Japanese spirit” (*nippon seishin*). Inspired by Soviet critiques of science, they wanted to reform “bourgeois biology” into “proletarian biology,” thus drawing biology away from the realm of “value-free” and pure science, and into a larger project of class struggle.¹⁷ For Yuiken members, simply writing and disseminating evolutionary theory became a subversive act against state ideology.¹⁸ To many Christian, Buddhist, and Shintō intellectuals, Yuiken’s arguments were a continuing reminder of the threat that evolutionary theory in the hands of the Left could pose to the country’s religion, culture, social stability, and the *kokutai*.

Science had thus become a battleground in the ideological struggles of the 1930s. As historian Mizuno Hiromi has rightly said, science was “an essential element of *Yuiken*’s intellectual challenge against what they saw as irrational and unscientific ideologies.”¹⁹ And evolutionary theory was at the front line of this struggle. Yuiken’s Marxist biologists were concerned about the antiscientific tendencies of Shintō nationalism and the threat to push evolutionary theory out of the education curriculum. Ishihara Tatsurō predicted rightly in 1937 that “the rise of antiscientific thought [read Japanism and Shintō ideology]” would have the result that “probably from now on, evolutionary thought will be given the cold shoulder.”²⁰

THE RELIGIOUS BACKLASH AGAINST EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

Antievolutionary ideas came mainly from conservative and ideological intellectuals and professors, some closely aligned with the government, whose ideas came to dominate the public sphere in the late 1930s. The story of antievolutionary thought in modern Japan was therefore not simply one of conservative Shintō priests or organizations opposing science. The Shintō priesthood was not very outspoken regarding evolutionary theory, and in 1921, during the more democratic Taisho period, one figure in a book published by the Shrine office (*Jinjakyoku*) in the Home Ministry even warned that it would be counterproductive to disseminate *kokutai* thought with too much emphasis on the creation myths: “To base the dignity of the *kokutai*

only on this [creation account] is dangerous. The people, who have been injected with the knowledge of evolutionary theory, which conflicts with this 'tale of creation of the land,' will not believe it."²¹ However, after the rise of the communist and antireligious movements, economic crises, and the wider sense of crisis developing during the 1920s and 1930s, reconciliatory voices such as these were few and far between, and lay intellectuals and ideologues dominated the debates.

Although antievolutionary thought in Japan emerged to a large degree in reaction to the Left, one of the distinctive and somewhat paradoxical aspects of antievolutionary thought in Japan was, simply put, the overlap, and probably mutual influence, between arguments from the Left and the Right. As we saw, the anarchist Ōsugi Sakae, while thoroughly supportive of evolution, had produced some of the first extensive critiques of natural selection theory. And it was the socialists and Marxists who had criticized Darwin and natural selection theory for reading British nineteenth-century individualism and capitalism into nature. During the interwar period, this critique would be further developed into the claim that natural selection theory was an ideological tool that enabled the subjugation of nature. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, these critiques would equally resonate with a new generation of nationalist ideologues who criticized Western influences and industrial capitalism.

One of the first extensive interwar rejections of evolution came from the religious anarchist Ishikawa Sanshirō (1876–1956). Ishikawa was baptized when he was in his twenties. He was one of the early Heiminsha socialists, but as Ōsugi Sakae would recall later, in the Heiminsha group, "only Ishikawa did not despise religion."²² Ishikawa later recalled, "From when I joined the socialists and threw myself in the movement thirty years ago, my largest worry was the dissonance between my religious sentiments and the social movement."²³ One of the intellectual tensions Ishikawa felt with the other socialists was their strong belief in evolutionary theory; he "started to doubt progressive evolutionary theory," that is, the notion that humans, like animals, would gradually become perfect through the process of natural selection, and second, the idea that society would gradually improve towards a free society through social evolution via the process of class struggle. After Ōsugi's death in 1923, Ishikawa became one of the key figures in the Japanese anarchist movement, and one of Japan's most radical critics of modernization.²⁴

Ishikawa's religious ideas were somewhat eclectic, drawing on philosophical sources such as Schopenhauer, Bergson, and vitalism, as well as religious sources, including Buddhist and Christian ones, but especially notable was the appearance of Daoism. In his earlier writings, he expounded

on the Dao as an absolute, infinite emptiness that contains “life” and encompasses all opposites, before adding, “this great spirit is what is called God.”²⁵

Ishikawa’s 1925 *Non-evolutionary Theory and Human Life* (*Hi shinkaron to jinsei*) was one of the first antievolutionary books to appear in Japan.²⁶ The opening of *Non-evolutionary Thought and Human Life* set a prophetic tone, arguing that evolutionary theory was a dangerous lie that threatened the fundamental harmony of humans with nature:

All the living beings living on the surface of the earth are born through the cooperation of heaven and earth. We children of the earth who realize this must make it our mission to cultivate the good, deep, wide, and beautiful earth. That is the ideal of the children of the earth—their goodness, it is everything. Politics, religion, and education must all be based on this fundamental principle. From the mid-nineteenth century, evolutionary theory emerged, and for a time, it dominated people’s minds. Now it also dominates people with frightening power. But we children of the earth have to see evolutionary theory as nothing more than the concoction of scholars, who are machines for producing illusions and fancies. The thought born from natural selection and the theory of the survival of the fittest is that of “mastery over nature.” The thought of the children of the earth rejects this.²⁷

Ishikawa thought the very idea of evolution was born from anthropocentrism and that its hidden goal was to put man at the pinnacle of evolution; it was thus an ideological tool to legitimate the subjugation of nature.²⁸ Linking the emergence of evolutionary theory with the rise of industrial culture and capitalism, Ishikawa combined a critique of evolution with an ecologist message. Ishikawa criticized evolutionary theory even more, however, for giving intellectual support to socialism and communism. Evolutionary theory was thus the ideology of both industrial capitalism and Marxism, and in Ishikawa’s view, was therefore synonymous with modernity itself. Hence, his verdict: “The history of the world from the second half of the nineteenth century to today’s twentieth century can be called the history of the crimes of evolutionary theory.”²⁹

Ishikawa was somewhat elusive in his position on evolutionary theory. He rejected Darwin’s theory of natural selection, adaptation, and the idea that evolution in the biological world was progressive. He referred to a number of non-Darwinian evolutionary theories such as orthogenesis, but he never clearly endorsed them. Inspired by Fabre and René Quinton (1866–1925), he argued that the “law of life” was “constancy [*jōjūsei*].”³⁰

Ishikawa echoed earlier Meiji Buddhist reactions against the idea of evolution as progress, and was also strongly influenced by the Christian idea of the fall.³¹ Time and again, Ishikawa described the decline of humanity in

terms of his being "expelled from the Garden of Eden," and he cast humanity as drifters who should return to their original home.³² Ishikawa imagined an original "golden age" of social harmony that included harmony with nature, egalitarianism, prediscursive and intuitive knowledge, and a natural religion.³³ Ishikawa also idealized, for example, Native American tribes as never having lost an original happiness and natural way of life. He relied on a somewhat curious theory, influenced by Reclus, according to which changes in the distance between the sun and the earth caused a disruption to an original constant climate, which in turn forced organisms to develop mechanisms to maintain their original state. In the human race, this led to the development of consciousness, which meant a distinction between subject and object, a separation of man from nature, and the rise of language, strife, and power relations, which eventually culminated in nation-states and capitalism.³⁴

Inspired by, among other works, the *Dao De Jing*, Ishikawa also developed a critique of language as a fundamentally distorting phenomenon. Both Daoism and Zen Buddhism have a long history of skepticism towards language, deeming ultimate reality as inexpressible in words: words bringing distinctions in a fundamentally single consciousness of a reality beyond language. For Ishikawa, too, the development of language was the source of dishonesty, distorted knowledge, and conflicts; consequently, to regain our "hometown," he argued, "we should free ourselves from the bonds of language."³⁵ Ishikawa's religious ideas on language and knowledge as a sign of humanity's separation from nature and as a source of conflict were fundamentally opposed to evolutionary theories (such as those by Darwin himself) of language and knowledge as features that coevolved with and enabled the social nature and cohesion of human societies, and were therefore favored by natural selection.

Ishikawa said that this cognitive and psychological human fall from paradise, not capitalism or industrial culture as the Marxists argued, was the root cause of all problems.³⁶ A revolution by the proletariat was thus not a solution. Man was "a religious animal," and the challenge was to retrieve the original natural and religious harmonious state of being, which would only be possible by discarding evolutionary theory and the idea of progress. Ishikawa envisioned a return to nature and an agricultural life, a free association of villages and regions, but, in later years, with the emperor as spiritual head. Ishikawa's arguments against evolutionary theory as part of a critique of both capitalism and Marxism, combined with an idealization of preindustrial life, would be virtually indistinguishable from some of the theories and ideals of the extreme Right in Japan. His ideals were shared by many Japanese nationalists and agriculturalists who were longing for a

return to a life of farming as an alternative to the vagaries of industrial capitalism, and who advocated intuition over logic. Ishikawa was a well-known figure, and his works were widely read.

During the interwar period, a new wave of Shintō intellectuals emerged, variously described as “ultranationalist” or “fundamentalist,” who advocated stronger versions of Shintō nationalism and the divinity and absolute rule of the emperor.³⁷ Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, conservative as well as radical right-wing thinkers and writers voiced their concern about the prevalence of materialism and Marxism in Japanese education, and the rampant “destructive thought” among the youth. The rise in nationalist and purist ideologies during this period—Shintō-inspired or otherwise—should be seen to a large degree as a reaction to both the popularity of Marxism in the intellectual world and the perceived pernicious effects of rampant consumerism, cosmopolitan urbanism, and individualism.

A turning point in the rise of nationalist Shintō was the Minobe affair of 1935. Minobe Tatsukichi, a professor of law, and later a member of the House of Peers, had asserted that sovereignty lay with the state and not the emperor, and that the emperor was only an ‘organ’ of the state. During the more democratic interwar period, this “Imperial Organ theory” was very influential in legal interpretations of the constitution. In 1935, however, Shintō nationalists and others who supported the divine right of imperial rule attacked Minobe and accused him of *lèse-majesté*. Minobe had to resign, the theory was discarded, and his books were banned. After this episode, the ideas of the divine descent of the emperor and the Japanese people, and the “divine nation” (*shinkoku*), were propagated more and more by the government.

After 1935, coinciding with the “Clarification of the *kokutai*” (*kokutai meichō*) campaign, and accelerating after the outbreak of the war in China in 1937, State Shintō began to take on a more and more exclusive and dominant character. Historian of religion Shimazono Susumu writes, “State Shintō had become the orthodox ideology of a totalitarian state.”³⁸ Historian Sheldon Garon writes, “After decades of denying that State Shintō was a religion, the statist Konoe Cabinet declared that it was the only religion,” and called the new system a “doctrinal absolutism.”³⁹ Whether Japan in the 1930s and 1940s can be characterized as totalitarian or fascist has been a matter of a very complex scholarly debate.⁴⁰ With the exception of communism, there was a degree of intellectual freedom in wartime Japan, and Christians and others were free to practice their religion. But there is no doubt that Shintō ideology was much more widely and intensely propagated after 1935, and that state control over religion expanded. During the Asia-Pacific War, Buddhist, Christian, and other religious groups were also

more heavily regulated and pressed to support *kokutai* ideology and the war effort, although many did so enthusiastically on their own volition.⁴¹

The 1935 moment of reassertion of the emperor's divine rule also coincided with a rise in antievolutionary ideas in Japan. Some of the most influential Shintō thinkers of this period drew on the philosophy of vitalism, and interpreted the *kami* more abstractly as an expression of a larger cosmic life-creating force (*seimei*, *seimeiryoku*, or *uchūseimei*), in some cases making the emperor the link with this cosmic life force. Even if the *kami* were not creators as in the Abrahamic religions, they were still seen as somehow at the origins of Japan and the Japanese. Many of these thinkers opposed evolutionary theory for its notion of descent of all of humanity from lower animals, and for its materialism.

Another product of the 1930s and 1940s, as historian Julia Thomas and others have described, was the rise of a discourse that tied nationalism to the unique beauty and the landscape of the nation of Japan, which presented a shift away from the progressive conceptions of nature associated with evolution ("nature as time") towards the exclusive nature of Japan ("nature as nation").⁴² In effect, this was a sacralization of the natural environment of Japan, thus providing, next to the imperial line and the bond between sovereign and subjects, another site of authenticity outside of historical change. It is in this context that not a few thinkers began to argue for an intrinsic Japanese respect for nature and a type of ecological thinking as inherent to Shintō, to Japanese Buddhism, or both. The notion of Shintō as basically a type of nature worship, "animism," or "ecology" has become very prevalent during the postwar period, and is promoted by Shintō organizations in Japan today, despite there being very little historical support for such an interpretation.⁴³

The interwar appropriation of vitalist philosophies by Shintō and other nationalist thinkers was an important step towards the construction of Shintō as animist and as a tradition that fosters closeness to nature. This was part of a wider reaction to not only industrialization, urbanization, and modernization (often denounced as Western), but also to Marxist and scientist materialism associated with evolutionary theory. The outright rejection of evolutionary theory was also one extreme position that was part of a larger wave of acts to overcome the materialism associated with the scientific worldview. And the emphasis on a uniquely Japanese closeness to nature was also often juxtaposed to Western industrial culture with its view of nature as something to be used for man's purposes and industry, and what was seen as its concomitant ideology: progressivism and evolution by natural selection and the "strong eating the weak." Already in the 1920s, in the wake of the Russian Revolution and the rice riots in Japan, which were

followed by a rising number of organizations that rejected democracy and urged a revival of the national spirit, many restless young intellectuals began to claim a certain naïve identification with the Japanese myths. New interpretations of the myths could provide a source of authenticity, community, and a “hometown” amidst the maelstrom of modernity. Ancient and mythological Japan was imagined as a superior civilization, the spirit of which still permeated the Japanese nation, and should be restored in a new restoration; later frequently termed the “Shōwa Restoration” (*Shōwa ishin*).⁴⁴ In a search for authenticity, nationalist thinkers connected Shintō with the larger interwar current of vitalism. Identifying the Shintō gods as “life forces” provided on the one hand a philosophically and quasi-scientifically valid way to talk in a new way about the ancient myths, while on the other also providing an alternative to reductionism and materialism.⁴⁵

These ideas of Shintō nationalism and vitalism became more mainstream and high profile due to one of most influential of these new Shintō theorists, Uesugi Shinkichi (1878–1929), a Tokyo University law professor who also taught at the Army War College (Rikugun Daigakkō), where the nation’s top army officers were educated. He and other Shintōists believed that a complete surrender to the emperor was the ancient belief of the Japanese, and they envisioned an ideal Japanese nation of perfect harmony between individual citizens and the emperor. They refuted social contract theory as “mechanistic” and based on Western individualism. For the same reasons, Uesugi opposed the application of natural selection theory to society. In the 1930s, nationalist Shintō intellectuals would oppose in one breath social contract theory and Darwinism. Somewhat ironically, given his opposition to the Left, Uesugi’s theory of a natural and spontaneous harmony significantly overlapped with and drew from Kropotkin’s theories on mutual aid.⁴⁶ In short, the new Shintō nationalist ideologues were fundamentally opposed to the struggle for survival.

Another prominent Shintō ideologue and antievolutionist was Kakei Katsuhiko (1872–1961). Kakei had studied at the University of Tokyo and for six years in Germany before becoming a law professor at the University of Tokyo, a prestigious position through which he was able to wield considerable influence.⁴⁷ Kakei wanted to find in the Japanese tradition something that could wield the same influence as philosophy and Christianity in European culture, which led him to study Buddhism and Shintō.⁴⁸ He became one of the most influential proponents of Tennō-centrism and the idea of Japan as a “divine country” (*shinkoku*), which meant for Kakei that all Japanese were *kami*. In his most widely read book, *The Way of the Gods* (*Kannagara no michi*) of 1925 he reinterpreted Ame-no-minaka-nushi, the first *kami* to appear in the *Kojiki*, in modern and pantheistic terms as “absolute infin-

ity," as encompassing totality, and as an animating "cosmic life force." Kakei saw the emperor, as a direct descendant of Amaterasu, as a manifestation of this cosmic life force on earth. Kakei envisioned a nation in which all individuals were a seamless unity—literally one body—connected to and united under the emperor. Although it was not his primary concern, in this and other works Kakei also criticized evolutionary theory. Given that *The Way of the Gods* was published by the Court Office for the Empress (*Kōgō gūshoku*) in the Imperial Household Agency, and reprinted multiple times before 1945, among others by the Shrine Office (*Jinjakyoku*) in the Ministry of the Interior, these ideas enjoyed some form of official approval.⁴⁹

Vitalism allowed Shintō scholars to interpret the *kami* of the classics more abstractly as cosmic forces, a strategy that probably sounded more acceptable to the public's more highly educated segments. This did not, however, preclude a number of Shintō thinkers such as Kakei to reject evolutionary theory: "A dog is a dog; a monkey is a monkey; the descendants of the *kami* are *kami*. We here today are descendants of the *kami*. Our ancestors are not monkeys or pheasants. Our ancestors are the humans—that is, gods—of the Age of the Gods."⁵⁰ Kakei also ridiculed archeological discussions of how and when the Japanese people had entered the Japanese archipelago: "It is clear that [the Japanese people] have originated in the Japanese land. There is nothing unclear about the fact that the Japanese, as humans, have Japan as their original land since the age of the Gods."⁵¹ In his view, the Japanese were created by and were manifestations of the gods, to which the Japanese people pray. Kakei also thought evolutionary theory threatened ancestor worship: "People who are deluded by evolutionary theory and vulgar biology say 'our ancestors are relatives of apes . . . and going further back in time, maggots and amoebae, so why should one pray to the ancestors?' "⁵² The emperor, he argued, could "not be understood as a biological living being." For Kakei, not only evolutionary biology but even chemistry was a misguided form of knowledge: the inorganic world was created by the gods and was "alive"; it was an "expression of cosmic life," and thus could not be understood in terms of the natural sciences, such as particles.⁵³ In this way, vitalism, despite its Western philosophical origins, found an application in nationalist Shintō theology.

Kakei might have appeared eccentric (he was known among students for suddenly interrupting lectures with prayers), but he wielded considerable influence during the late 1930s and the war era. After 1935, he worked as a senior councilor at the Ministry of Education. He lectured to Pu Yi (the "Last Emperor" of the Qing dynasty) when the latter took the throne as head of the new Japan-controlled state of Manchukuo. He also lectured to Empress Teimei (1884–1951), wife of the Taishō emperor and mother of

Hirohito, who became a passionate Shintō believer, and is believed to have had a powerful influence on Hirohito. Kakei was also a favorite among radical military officers belonging to the “Imperial Way” faction. Shintō absolutist interpretations of the emperor were useful for the military, as obedience to the emperor could be cast as obedience to the military, especially the army, which had taken on the designation of Imperial Army (Kōgun) in the 1930s. During the war, Kakei was even given radio time to perform Shintō song-prayers.⁵⁴ Kakei’s type of Shintō ideology was propagated as the reason for Japan’s superiority and was used to legitimate military expansionism. High-profile intellectuals with official government positions such as Kakei and Uesugi, Hiraizumi Kiyoshi, Kihira Tadayoshi, and others, began to exert a tight grip on the intellectual world in the 1930s.

Antievolutionary Shintō theology was not only propagated from above but also from grassroots movements unaffiliated with the government, but who helped shape nationalist Shintō ideology. This is what scholars of religion have called the phenomenon of “State Shintō from below”: grassroots religious and nationalist support for State Shintō.⁵⁵ One example of this is Shindō tendōkyō, a small Shintō-inspired new religion founded in the rural Yamaguchi Prefecture in western Japan by Tomokiyo Yoshisane (1888–1952). Shindō tendōkyō (still active in Yamaguchi) emphasizes spiritual experience, worship of Amaterasu, the imperial family, and “spiritualist national defense” (*reiteki kokubō*). In 1938, the group warned against the dangers of evolutionary theory in a booklet titled *Fundamental Errors Concerning the Origins of the Nation* (*Kokka kigenron no kompon gobyū*). In the opening, it singled out the dangers of socialist and anarchist views, especially when the nation was at war, and lamented that both “the great superstition” of evolutionary theory and the idea of humans having evolved from animals had become popular among scholars. The text rejects evolutionary theory for its association with Marxism and as being inadequate to understand the origins of the nation.⁵⁶ “Humans are not descendants of apes; they are but transformed deities.”⁵⁷ Humans have descended from heaven and have slightly deteriorated in the process; nevertheless, the difference between men and gods is smaller than that between men and animals. Hence, evolutionary theory was the single gravest threat to Japan and the *kokutai*: “That those concerned with education who worship Darwin try [also] to believe in the Imperial Rescript of Education is like trying to mix water and oil. I feel that this is the largest danger threatening our nation today.”⁵⁸

Many intellectuals would also jump onto the propaganda bandwagon. Perhaps most symptomatic in this respect is the case of Tokutomi Sohō (1863–1957), a journalist and one of Japan’s most influential public intellectuals. During the Meiji period, he had been a strong advocate of modernization

along Western lines and one of the most influential proponents of Herbert Spencer’s liberalism. After a series of what he and many others like him saw as humiliating events for Japan, such as the triple intervention of 1895 and the anti-Japanese immigration laws of California of the 1920s, he gradually started to shift to the Right. During the war, he became a leading member of a propaganda section within the Ministry of the Interior’s Information Department (Jōhōkyoku). The former liberal Spencerian evolutionist now proclaimed, “Japan’s Imperial family was directly descended from the gods which had created the universe, including the island homeland of the people.”⁵⁹ For Tokutomi and others, Spencer had long receded in the shadows, while they turned to the light of the gods.

The most influential—and arguably also the most interesting and erudite—anti-Darwinist was Kihira Tadayoshi (1874–1949). Although now sunk into oblivion, during the prewar period he was one of the most respected philosophers in Japan. Kihira graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1900, and, among other places, took up posts at Tōyō University, Gakushūin, and Tokyo Imperial University. Kihira was an industrious scholar and professor, building a solid reputation as a Hegelian philosopher, and became an influential figure in interpreting and spreading state ideology during the 1930s. In 1931, the Ministry of Education charged a committee to investigate the problem of the spread of leftist ideas among students. The committee concluded that Japanese students had gone astray because of an “exclusively blind imitation of foreign ideas, a bias towards the viewpoint of the natural sciences, and an extreme stagnation of the study of our country’s characteristic culture.”⁶⁰ In response, the Ministry of Education set up the Institute for the Study of National Spiritual Culture (Kokumin seishin bunka kenkyūjo, abbreviated as Seiken), aiming “to clarify the principles of our *kokutai* and national spirit, to promote the national culture, and to criticize ideas from abroad.”⁶¹ With its official aim of opposing Marxism and correcting the “bias towards the natural sciences,” Seiken, which included a number of antievolutionist thinkers, targeted evolutionary theory. Kihira played a leading role in the institute. The Seiken institute spread ideology through the reeducation of middle school and high school teachers, public lectures, and the publication of books and pamphlets, and it was also active in the training of teachers in Japan’s colonies in Korea and Taiwan. Several members were influential in drafting the *Kokutai no hongi*, one of the official formulations of state ideology in late 1930s Japan.

As part of this ideological effort, Kihira took the lead in a campaign against Darwin and evolutionary theory. In a November 1936 speech titled “Japanese Spirit and Natural Science,” for example, Kihira stated that upon asking who one’s ancestors were:

as far as the Japanese people are concerned, I don't think the answer will be a monkey, or something between an ape and a human (I don't even know what that would be), much less one of the lower animals. But *for people who have been drilled into individualism for a long time*, it would not be such a problem. For example, Americans have no problem saying their ancestors were Scottish, German, or Italian. But for us Japanese, that would be a big problem, because the whole of our nation is born out of Izanami and Izanagi; our ancestors are the *kami*.⁶²

On one level, Kihira was a straightforward Shintō antievolutionist, but the remark about individualism shows something else was at play. Based on his interpretations of Hegel, combined with elements from Zen Buddhist philosophy, Kihira had developed his own Japanist "philosophy of *gyō*," which can be translated as both "action" and "religious training." In his 1923 *The Philosophy of Action* (*Gyō no Tetsugaku*), Kihira argued that *gyō* was the culmination of a history of growing self-consciousness, which reached its highest state when self-consciousness denied itself. Based on Zen Buddhist ideas (such as "finding the true self by losing the self") this "losing of one's consciousness," was a peculiarly *Japanese* action or state of mind, which Western individualists could not understand. Neither could it be explained by modern psychology. For Kihira, losing the self meant dissolving the self in the Japanese nation: living by grace and through the power of the emperor and the *kami*. In this time of ideological crisis, Kihira argued, the next historical stage was for the Japanese to realize fully this "action," and surrender to nation, emperor, and the gods. Hence, Kihira argued, the struggle for survival could not explain the self-sacrificing spirit of the Japanese.⁶³

But Kihira also had scientific objections to evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theorists, he argued, took the classification of existing species and then illegitimately posited temporal relations between them. Furthermore, evolution was not observable; hence, it was speculative. Kihira also argued that the random variation in natural selection theory meant that it was antiteleological and therefore could not explain the natural world. Evolutionary theorists did not know the unit of selection: Does selection occur on the level of the individual or of the species? In evolutionary theory, "fitness" was not defined. If "fitness" meant the features of those organisms that survive, it made natural selection theory circular: the fittest survive because they are the fittest, which are the organisms that survive. The human mind had a unity and wholeness that could not be explained by the Darwinist mechanistic accumulation of elements. Kihira also rejected evolutionary ethics: it could not give any specific guidelines for action, nor could it explain self-sacrifice.

While Kihira opposed evolution, he avoided an explicit discussion of the problem of creation versus evolution, and he did not develop a creationist theology. The meaning and status of the *kami* in Kihira's philosophy also was unclear. In his *Japanese Spirit* (*Nippon Seishin*) of 1930, for example, he criticized evolutionary theory "as unsuitable for our national morality," but gave a more creative and philosophical interpretation of the creation myths, equating Ame-no-minaka-nushi with "concept" and "productive creation." Kihira's deities were probably less divine creators than they were divine origins.⁶⁴

Kihira's opposition to evolutionary theory was also motivated by his critique of modernity and modern science, and its detrimental effects on Japan. Modern science was materialist, had become an unending search to break up nature (and man) into ever-smaller parts, and had "mechanized" nature and man; driven by the metaphor of nature as a machine, science tried to explain everything with the law of cause and effect between these isolated material parts. The ideal of objectivity had led to the division between subject and object. Modern science, the nation-state, and capitalism, Kihira argued, had coemerged in the Anglo-Saxon world, and then expanded with force across the globe.

The modern view of nature, according to Kihira, was rooted in the Anglo-Saxon culture of individualism. The idea of breaking nature apart into elements, he argued, reflected social contract theory: individuals, in a natural state of struggle, formed nations for their own welfare, and hence were unable to form a unity that was more than the sum of individuals. The industrial revolution was also based on the pursuit of individual profit, and made use of the new sciences: "The goal of the industrial revolution was, of course, the accumulation of wealth, and to this end, natural science mechanized nature so it could be put to our use. Not only nature, but also man himself was mechanized."⁶⁵ The ideology of liberalism, according to Kihira, was nothing more than "an embellishment for the mechanization of man to put him to use as a machine."⁶⁶ And since the sight of people in factories was not very pretty, eventually, the Anglo-Saxons, and especially the Americans, started to move factories to Asia. Despite his opposition to Marxism, he understood why workers wanted to revolt.⁶⁷

The worldview of modern science had thus been imposed upon Japan and other nations, destroying local culture. Based on individualism, it was a fragmented and divisive view of nature. The modern Cartesian opposition of subject and object had led to a loss of the unity of man and nature. Nature was valued only for its use for the capitalist economy. The model of nature as machine led to a loss of a unified view of nature. And materialism had led to a loss of subjectivity, spirituality, and social harmony.

For Kihira and others like him, evolutionary theory represented an amoral view of nature and society. In the Anglo-Saxon world, especially in the United States, which exemplified the “realization of the extremes of civilization and [was] the ultimate practitioner of mechanization,” with its mistaken belief in evolutionary theory, “the relations between people has become extremely shallow, and only the use of nature by man is promoted.”⁶⁸ Among nationalist thinkers, the West, and especially America became synonymous with “machine culture.” In the critique of Western modernity, coinciding with Ishikawa Sanshirō’s earlier theories, Japanese right-wing anti-Darwinism had an early ecological and anticolonial dimension.⁶⁹

For Kihira and others like him, evolutionary theory was the epitome of everything that was wrong with the dominant modern Western scientific worldview: evolutionary theory was materialist and based on egoism, and thus had pernicious moral effects, destroyed the unity of man with the gods, and worst of all, was embraced by the atheist Marxists. Evolution was thus completely incompatible with the Japanese moral and spiritual unity of the nation, the *kokutai*, which was based on harmony, loyalty, and self-sacrifice for nation and emperor.

Kihira (perhaps reacting against the advocacy of free love by figures such as Kita Ikki and Ōsugi Sakae) even partially blamed evolutionary theory for the loosening of sexual mores: “as we can see in the West, no matter how elaborate civilization looks on the outside, it is ugly on the inside. Evolutionary theory, which sees humans as beasts, provides a great excuse to destroy morality, and especially make the relation between man and woman uncontrolled.”⁷⁰

Similarly to Kakei Katsuhiko and other Shintō ideologues, Kihira also interpreted the Japanese nation and its divine origins in vitalist terms: “However you look at it, it is beyond any doubt that, although the world is big, it is only in Japan that the bond with the great origin of Life (the *kami*) is not severed. Life is one; it does not allow for a mechanistic division into this and that.”⁷¹ For Kihira, a moral life—living for the emperor—meant giving oneself over to these larger life forces (“action”) of the *kami*. The losing of one’s consciousness would result in rediscovering harmony and unity with others, with the nation, with the natural community, and with nature and the cosmos. Based on elements of Buddhism, Shintō, and Western philosophy, Kihira propagated a religious and philosophical opposition to evolutionary theory, but without explicit creationism. Kihira’s antievolutionism would exert a large influence on Japanese ideology.

Seiken counted a number of other well-known antievolutionists and others who came to propagate Shintō myths, such as Hozumi Yatsuka and Nishi Shin’ichirō (1873–1943). For example, Nishi, like Kihira, a professor in

philosophy, argued that the Shintō creation myths, in contrast to evolutionary theory and other theories, told of an "absolute beginning" and were essential to the understanding of Japan as an imperial state, and that the Japanese imperial family, its people, and the very soil and flora and fauna were descended from the gods. Social contract theory did not apply to Japan, in his view, as the "national structure" (*kokka soshiki*) was "sacred."⁷²

Shintō ideologues such as Kihira and Nishi thus attempted to establish a sacralization of "Japan," not only of the imperial house, but also of the Japanese people, the Japanese social structure, and even the very soil and its natural environment. These ideas were genuine expressions of a religious worldview and reactions against modernity and the implications of science, but ultimately, the purpose was political. These ideologues tried to formulate a theological and philosophical basis for a national unity, and as part of this process, opposed evolutionary theory because it represented reductionism, materialism, individualism, liberalism, Marxism, and even promiscuity.

Through Seiken's forums on education, Kihira and others propagated antievolutionism to schoolteachers. In 1935, Kihira became a member of a government committee to reform education, for which he circulated a pamphlet calling for the elimination of evolutionary theory from the curriculum. The reasons he gave were that evolutionary theory had helped Marxism, and that it claimed the Japanese ancestors were apes. It caused the famous philosopher Nishida Kitarō to stop attending this committee, although he only complained in private about the tendencies of Kihira and the Seiken institute. In no small part due to the efforts of Kihira and others, the tide, due to the influence of Shintō nationalism, was turning against evolutionary theory to a significant degree.

These conservative intellectuals should not be dismissed as irrational and antiscientific, however. Some philosophers attempted to create a new paradigm of thinking that was beyond modern science, and for some, this would be based on a "Japanese" religious view of nature. Kihira's 1937 *Japanese Spirit and Natural Science* as typical in this respect. Despite his ideological credentials, he warned *against* an "extreme shallow Japanism," against what he viewed as the mistaken idea that the Japanese spirit and the natural sciences were mutually exclusive, and against the idea that Japan should get rid of Western science.⁷³ On the contrary, he argued, science should be changed according to the Japanese spirit. Instead of a coexistence of "Western science and technology, Eastern morality," the latter should determine the former. This new "Japanese science" would overcome the detrimental fragmentations and would be based on a unity of subject and object.⁷⁴ Instead of controlling nature, Japanese science would "follow Nature." Humans were

always part of nature, and should give up a misplaced search for objectivity and neutrality. In contrast to Western and Marxist materialism, Japanese science would treat matter, which was the object for physics, as “divine matter” (*shinbutsu*). Nature would be seen as a whole, organized as such by the subject, which achieved a “higher consciousness.”⁷⁵ With other Seiken members promoting similar arguments, the idea of a new spiritualized science gained traction (although the idea also had its critics), and even the minister of education, Hashida Kunihiko (1882–1945), promoted the idea of a national science with Japanese spiritual characteristics.⁷⁶

These attempts to imbue science with a Japanese religious spirit have to be distinguished from another ideological effort occurring at the same time: the promotion of science and technology and the discourse of Japan as a superior scientific nation and empire—what historian Mizuno Hiromi has described as “scientific nationalism.”⁷⁷ In contrast to scientific nationalism, Kihira Tadayoshi and Hashida Kunihiko attempted to reverse the drive to access a universal science; this was a “Japanese science,” that is, a scientific knowledge particular to Japan—a nationalist science.

RECONCILING SHINTŌ AND EVOLUTION

Not all Shintō thinkers in the interwar- and wartime periods rejected evolutionary theory. “Shintō” was a variegated complex and should not be seen as aligned in toto with the government and *kokutai* ideology: indeed, several Shintō-based sects had been suppressed by the state. A few attempted to reconcile Shintō, and even *kokutai* ideology, with evolutionary theory, but unlike Kihira Tadayoshi, they were not figures in positions of power or involved in the official dissemination of ideology.

For example, the Shintō mystic Arafuku Michinari (1871–1953), in contrast to Kihira, tried to reconcile the ancient Shintō myths with evolution.⁷⁸ Arafuku worked at a textile company in Tokyo for many years until sickness forced him to quit the company in 1928. He had several mystical experiences, and founded Michihiroki kai, a small study group and a variant of the many currents of revivalist Shintō (*fukko shintō*) that argued for the return to an original and pure form of Shintō; he also had a series of books published. Arafuku’s version of Shintō was a kind of fundamentalist spiritualism that called for a return of the Shintō classics to retrieve the “original philosophy of life” from the ancestors. He rejected foreign thought, including Buddhism and Confucianism; his position on Confucianism went against official ideological tracts such as the *Kokutai no hongī* and the Imperial Rescript on Education, which explicitly incorporated elements of Confucianism.

In his 1936 *Outline of the Pure True Way* (*Junsei shindō tai'i*), Arafuku interpreted the ancient Japanese myths as thoroughly universal, claiming that the *Kojiki* and other classics were accounts of the genesis of the earth and the evolution of life, and to a large degree were in accord with modern science, but surpassed it in many ways.⁷⁹ In Arafuku's view, the world had emerged from a divine core, described as pure light and life, which had solidified and formed the earth. This was what the classics meant when they talked of "descended from heaven." Arafuku believed that the names of the *kami* appearing in the classics were intended to express natural events, processes, and forces, with the understanding that these were ultimately of divine character.⁸⁰ The Central Reed Plains, the dwelling place of the first *kami*, was the universe; the gods Izanami-no-mikoto and Izanagi-no-mikoto were "the powers that make formed organisms appear"; and "the floating bridge of heaven" (*Ama no ukibashi*) on which Izanami and Izanagi stood when they stirred the seas with a spear, thus giving rise to the islands of Japan, was the stratosphere.⁸¹ Hiruko, the first *kami* born of Izanami and Izanagi, was, in fact, "the original species that became the organisms on the earth's crust, and gave rise to the bacteria."⁸² The deity Susano-o actually "means the evolving living beings" (*shinkaseibutsu*), and is "the divine power of the unification of life."⁸³ According to Arafuku, the fact that the god Susano-o's name changed in the classics to Haya-susano-o and then to Take-haya-susano-o expressed the evolution of organisms towards higher life forms.⁸⁴

In *Junsei shindō tai'i*, Arafuku gave a detailed account of the origins of the earth, the Japanese islands, and the evolution of life. Distinctive is Arafuku's explanation of the myths in terms of the emergence of the islands of Japan: first Awajishima, followed by Shikoku, Kyūshū, Honshū and so on, with life simultaneously further evolving. For example, when discussing the emergence of Shikoku, Arafuku writes, "Hiruko's evolution progressed greatly, and tiny water mosses developed; in these, appetite grew, and in the process, when these developed into the mosses, the island of Shikoku emerged."⁸⁵ Arafuku thus equated the creation of the Japanese islands with the evolution of life.

That Arafuku was not simply attempting to defend Shintō as compatible with modern science can be seen by his critical attitude towards modern science itself, which he thought was "riddled with contradictions." Indeed, he rejected modern scientific theories such as continental drift (though it should be mentioned this theory was not yet widely accepted among scientists) and accounts that the Japanese people had originated from other areas of the world before migrating to Japan. Arafuku interpreted the sequence

of the Japanese creation myths as being literally true: the Japanese islands were the first to have formed on earth, and the first organisms and stages of evolution took place in Japan. The human race thus also originated in Japan, and all civilization too, before it moved westwards: "The earth's first self-consolidating island was in our Japan, and thus the first life also emerged here. Therefore, the place that must form the basis of the evolution of these organisms has to be Japan. Civilization moves westwards. The human race also moves westwards. All life moves westwards."⁸⁶

With Japan as the cradle of life and the human race, the Japanese took a special and divine position, and other human races were like "branches and leaves" that emerged from the trunk of the divine imperial line. The *kokutai* ideology was thus thoroughly universal.⁸⁷

Ideologically speaking, ideologues such as Kihira on the one hand and Arafuku on the other were overall in agreement, affirming the centrality of the Japanese myths and the uniqueness of the *kokutai*; while differing on specific scientific theories, they were weary of modern science. Arafuku's theory was vitalist: it aimed to overcome the materialism associated with modern science and Marxism, and placed the divine at the heart of reality. Striving to overcome secularism and the threatening divisions in society between Right and Left, he advocated religious practices that aided individual intuition, which would enable one to retrieve an original Japanese and pure philosophy of life, that is, the original philosophy of the ancestors. Kihira rejected evolution, whereas Arafuku did not. The major difference was that while Arafuku was on the fringes of society, Kihira held official functions as a professor and in the Ministry of Education. Kihira's propagation of the *kokutai* ideology was much more inclusive than Arafuku's, allowing for Buddhism, Confucianism, and incorporating German philosophy, but in his mission to pull the rug from under Marxism as well as from under Western liberalism, he rejected evolution.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

A wide range of people, not just government ideologues, were concerned about the association of evolutionary theory with Marxist atheism, deeming it therefore a threat to social stability. This can be seen in Christians' responses during this period. Let us start by looking in more detail at the Catholic thinker and priest Iwashita (Francis Xavier) Sōichi (1889–1940) in the 1930s.⁸⁸ A much underappreciated and understudied factor until recently, Catholicism in Japan was also an important element in the complex religious and ideological ecology of this period.⁸⁹

Catholics in Japan, like their Protestant counterparts, had struggled with the image of foreignness, but even during the war years, Catholics and other Christians were tolerated, continued to publish, took up high positions, including in the armed forces, and some actively supported emperor ideology. Unlike the case with Protestant missionaries, the Catholic missionaries who came to Japan after the Meiji Restoration did not make a big impact on the debates over evolutionary theory.⁹⁰ Broadly speaking, it is safe to say that Catholics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to support allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures and the scientific investigation of nature, but tended to oppose materialist as well as pantheist interpretations of evolutionary theory.

Iwashita Sōichi was "the intellectual fount of modern Japanese Catholicism."⁹¹ Outside of the Catholic community in Japan, he was also one of the well-known figures in the prewar philosophical world.⁹² Iwashita's attitude to modernity, as Kevin Doak states, "can be summarized around two key arguments, one about the limits of science, the other about the limits of individuals."⁹³ These arguments, together with his mission to defend Catholic faith in Japan, informed his ideas on evolutionary theory. Iwashita's approach to evolutionary theory, however, should also be understood in the context of the interwar rise of the antireligious Left.

In his lectures, published after the war as *The Faith of Catholicism* (*Katorikku no shinkō*), Iwashita discussed evolutionary theory as part of his effort to clarify and advance Catholic faith for a wider audience.⁹⁴ Similarly to Kihira, Iwashita argued that Japan should make it a priority to counter the rise of "dangerous thought" (*kiken shisō*, a shorthand for left-wing theories) among the youth, and the use of materialist evolutionary theory to attack religion: "In the end, what is necessary is a religion that can establish a basis for morality in the face of scientific critique."⁹⁵

In the increasingly radicalized political atmosphere of interwar Japan, Iwashita essentially took a conservative position: he saw the nation and the existing social order in all countries and cultures as together making up and representing God's order on earth. States preserve order in this world, and through this existing order, the Kingdom of God would eventually be realized. It is no surprise that Iwashita saw revolutionary Marxism as a grave threat. In 1926, for example, when he criticized a group of students who refused military service while using their Christian faith as an excuse, he emphasized that the Catholic Church was not a destabilizing force: "Throughout the ages and in all countries, we [Catholics] have always been the allies of the right order, and the enemies of sudden and radical revolution."⁹⁶ Iwashita deplored both the rise of the revolutionary Left and

the reactionary swing to the Right with its call for a return to the Shintō myths.⁹⁷

While Iwashita rejected both the extreme Left and Right, he clearly saw the cause of the polarization as coming from revolutionary Marxists and their rejection of religion and the social order. This led him to come to the partial defense of Shintō. "Saying that shrines are not religion and such, the greatest blasphemies are proclaimed against Shintō, and as long as there are no Shintōists to counter them, what is called the national religion is deteriorating, while on the other hand, violence and labor unrest is getting worse."⁹⁸ In Iwashita's view, Shintō and the existing social order were thus the better alternative in comparison to revolutionary destructive upheaval, but he did predict Japan might ultimately have to choose Catholicism:

The times are changing fast. Can we really say that now is not the time that militarism, bureaucratic rule, shrines, Buddhist pagodas, all philosophies and "isms" aren't about to be swept away by the angry waves of world revolution that are threatening like a surging wave? . . . The whole of Japan will have to choose between God and the devil, the black of Catholicism or the red of Bolshevism—can anyone say that time is not coming?⁹⁹

Iwashita saw the use of materialist evolutionary theory to criticize religion, both Shintō and Catholicism, as nothing more than attempts to undermine the social order. He saw this "abuse of evolutionary theory" as a major problem in education, where some "irresponsible teachers" were putting dangerous ideas in the minds of the young. In contrast to Kihira, Iwashita was not outright opposed to evolutionary theory, but did attempt to greatly limit and contain its impact. To a degree, then, Kihira and Iwashita represent two different responses to evolutionary theory in the ideologically heightened 1930s: rejection and limited affirmation, respectively, while both saw themselves as defending the social order against the antireligious and revolutionary Left.

Iwashita's ideas, though similar to other Christian responses to science, should be seen as part of his polemic against atheist Marxism and anarchism. He argued that evolutionary theory could not be used to discredit religion and creation, since science and religion were talking about different aspects of reality; religion, however, concerned a higher realm of reality. Iwashita defended creationism, which he defined as the making from nothingness into being and thus could only be the work of an omnipotent and transcendent God. He argued that creation was a "supratemporal event" and "an event beyond the reach of experimental science."¹⁰⁰ This meant, he argued, that "Creation and evolution were totally different concepts and that which is created could evolve, but evolution could under no circum-

stances be creation; creation is necessary to explain the origin of the subject (*shutai*) that is evolving."¹⁰¹

Hence, Iwashita stood opposed to the antireligious Left; in his view, evolutionary theory could not be used against creationism to discredit religion. His separating creation from evolution set Iwashita's argument apart from Protestant (and similar Buddhist) theories that conceptualized evolution as the process by which God created all beings (or how the Buddha realized itself in the cosmos). Iwashita thus followed the strict Catholic rejection of all forms of pantheism, and, in Iwashita's case, of Bergson's "creative evolution" as well.¹⁰² Iwashita believed that God worked through and was present in nature, but remained transcendent. While admitting for the possibility of a limited element of evolution within a creationist theology, Iwashita nevertheless moved strongly to limit the explanatory scope of evolutionary theory, calling Darwin's theory an "unlikely hypothesis," and rejecting the idea of animal ancestry, since humans—as spiritual and moral beings—were essentially different from animals.¹⁰³

Many other Christians, beginning in the 1930s, were much less subtle, and a large number committed themselves unwaveringly to the emperor system, and later the war effort. Under the name of "Christianity on Japanese terms" many prominent Christian thinkers, including Watanabe Tsuneyoshi (1867–1944), Imaizumi Genkichi (1891–1969), Katō Kazuo (1887–1951), and Hiyane Antei (1892–1970), affirmed positions such as that Japan was a divine nation (the "Kingdom of God"), and that the emperor was divine and his word representative of the word of God. These positions became codified in the United Church of Christ in Japan (*Nihon kirisuto kyōdan*), an umbrella group for all Protestant organizations in Japan set up in 1941 with support of the Ministry of Education, and which endorsed the emperor system.¹⁰⁴ Many of these Christians criticized socialist Christians such as Kagawa Toyohiko, reconceptualized Christianity as "Asian," and opposed "Western" ideas such as liberalism and Marxism.¹⁰⁵ Proponents of this Shintō-Christian syncretism also advanced creationism and rejected evolution: Watanabe equated Amenominakanushi with an all-creating God and the three creating deities with the Holy Trinity, and Hiyane Antei stated that Christianity "does not see the world as having come into being from nothing, nor that it transformed by itself," but that everything was created by God/Amenominakanushi.¹⁰⁶ By advancing these positions, Japanese Christians thus also brought a new form of Christian creationism effectively into the *kokutai* ideology, which, while officially excluding Marxism and individualism, integrated Shintō, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, while exerting a centripetal force around and towards the core of the emperor.

THE BIOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF THE EMPEROR

To return to the topic of evolutionary theory and Shintō ideology, what about the figure who was at the symbolic center of all this, the emperor himself? One of the most paradoxical aspects of the history of evolutionary theory and ideology in Japan is that Emperor Hirohito, under whose reign divine descent and emperor worship reached unprecedented heights, was himself also a biologist. There was a kind of logic to this, however.

Scholars have argued that in the twentieth century there were two doctrines in place concerning the Japanese emperor. One was “esoteric,” a theory for the educated, compatible with more complex legal theories: the emperor was an organ of the state; the other was “exoteric,” for the masses: the imperial family was of divine lineage, and as head of the extended family of the Japanese people, ruled directly over them. In the context of the crises of the 1930s and the demands of the war in China, faced with the (perceived) need among ideologues to strengthen national ideology, the balance between these two theories broke down, and the “exoteric,” literal interpretation of the divine descent of the emperor, such as that promoted by Uesugi Shinkichi and Kakei Katsuhiko, became dominant.¹⁰⁷ The idea that the imperial line was not only of divine ancestry, but that the emperor himself was divine (*arahitogami*), was disseminated in the classrooms. Hirohito’s tailors and doctors were not allowed to touch his body. During the war, soldiers bowed in the direction of the Imperial Palace. But what about Hirohito himself?

In his youth, Hirohito had shown much interest in biology. At Gakushūin University, Hirohito began studying biology under professor Hattori Hirotarō (1875–1965).¹⁰⁸ Hattori would remain in the emperor’s service for thirty years. He taught the crown prince how to use a microscope, go underwater swimming, and classify specimens. In 1925, Hirohito initiated the building of a biological research center within the grounds of the Akasaka Palace, and in 1928, he had the Imperial Biological Research Institute built at the Fukiage Gardens. Hattori became its first director. Together with his team, Hirohito conducted research mainly on Hydrozoa, and on slime molds, the enigmatic organisms studied by Minakata Kumagusu (see chapter 3). He also conducted a series of surveys of Sagami Bay, discovering many new species, and produced a series of publications.¹⁰⁹ Hirohito’s interest in biology seemed to have been genuine. He spent as much time as possible in the biological research center, and when on official visits to the country, surprised officials by suddenly groping for some organism.

Through Hattori, Hirohito was also in contact with a network of biologists in Japan and abroad.

Beginning in the 1920s, the Japanese government actively and very consciously promoted the image of Hirohito the biologist to the public. On New Year's Day 1926, all Japanese newspapers published a photograph, provided by the Imperial Household Agency, of Hirohito sitting at a desk with a microscope (figure 7), and a photograph of the biological research institute. In later years, other photographs and reports of Hirohito's fieldwork and his discoveries of new species followed. Hirohito's expeditions became large events involving dozens of officials from the court and required intense preparation in the local governments.

Hattori lectured to Hirohito on evolution, based somewhat ironically on the books of Oka Asajirō, who had clashed with *kokutai* ideology.¹¹⁰ The research institute displayed a bust of Charles Darwin. Hirohito himself seemed to have been very aware of the contradiction between evolutionary theory and *kokutai* ideology, but in public, he never discouraged belief in his divine descent. Migita Hiroki, a scholar who has studied the public presentation and photography of Hirohito, has also found that after the



Figure 7. Hirohito in his laboratory. *Asahi shinbun*, January 1, 1926.

outbreak of the war with China in 1937, the government dramatically dropped the promotion and circulation of images of Hirohito as biologist. Migita and other scholars have argued that the image of Hirohito as biologist was a tool for the necessary promotion of science among the public, and also to take away the wind from those on the Right who criticized science because of its contradictory relation with the imperial history of Japan.¹¹¹ However, most major ideologues that harbored doubts about evolutionary theory were not against science as such. Promoting science through the emperor could have been done by any other branch of science. Pictures of the emperor staring through a telescope or leading a team of engineers building a bridge would have had the same effect. Why biology?

While the state indeed promoted the image of Hirohito as biologist, Hirohito's own enthusiasm for biology, evidenced in his youth, cannot be dismissed.¹¹² Hirohito's research activities took place often in spite of the (privately expressed) scorn they drew from some in the inner circles of power. Historian Hara Takashi has argued that Hirohito's own religious beliefs are of great import to understand him, and he draws the attention away from Hirohito's political role to the important fact that Hirohito was most diligent in two things: the official Shintō rituals and his biological research.¹¹³ As head priest at the pinnacle of State Shintō, the emperor had to perform a series of rituals and duties. The previous Meiji and Taishō emperors had been uninterested in the Shintō rituals and mostly did not attend them. But Hirohito took the rituals extremely seriously. Until he was physically unable to continue, he insisted on performing all the lengthy tasks. One of the most central rituals was the *niinamesai*, the annual harvest ritual in which the emperor presented the year's new rice to the gods, and Amaterasu, the sun Goddess in particular, in gratitude for the year's harvest. Hara argues that Hirohito's zeal to perform the official Shintō rituals and his biological research were intimately connected. From 1929, Hirohito also started to plant and harvest rice himself, an unprecedented move for the Japanese emperor. This was an invented tradition, but it had a popular resonance with the image of the ancient role of the emperor as ensuring a good harvest. The rice would be brought to Ise shrine, where the goddess Amaterasu was enshrined. It is possible that in harvesting rice and in biological research, as well as with the rituals, the emperor ensured an image for himself as caring for the well-being of nature and the people of the nation. But perhaps there was also a deeper connection.

For example, Nagazumi Torahiko (1902–), who served Hirohito for many years, wrote after Hirohito's death:

His Majesty was eager in his biological research, but when I and other laymen [nonprofessional biologists] look at all things in nature, we cannot help thinking that there must be something that through the endless series of changes, something unifying that gives order, something divine that gives rise to, and nurtures all things that exist. I never asked his Majesty this, but I sensed that in his biological research, he had a strong belief [in the divine].¹¹⁴

Seen in this way, the image of the emperor as descendant of the gods becomes perhaps less incompatible with biology: as Shintō head priest, ritual farmer, and biologist, he was a link between the life-bringing forces of the gods and the nation. It is hard to establish a direct link with the inner life of Hirohito and the Shintō theorists such as Uesugi Shinkichi, Kakei Katsuhiko, and Kihira. But Kakei Katsuhiko, for one, had lectured to Hirohito's mother, who had become a very devout believer in Shintō, and was said to be influential in Hirohito's religious zeal. While Kakei and the like had rejected evolution, it is probably not a coincidence that both Hirohito's activities neatly expressed the more abstract vitalist interpretations of the *kami*, functioning as an abstract absolute cosmic life force, with the emperor as the connector between this force and his people. Perhaps Hirohito came to see in rice as well as the smallest organisms such as the slime molds the life-bringing powers of the Japanese gods, to which he prayed in the Shintō rituals. In the public construction of the emperor as well, the figure of emperor as biologist was perhaps not only a way to promote science and Japan's modernity but also a way to combine Japan's modern scientific image with its divine roots. The bug in the system that hindered a very smooth working of this image was Darwin, and the public image of the emperor as biologist vanished as his stature as living god rose to prominence. And as Japan plunged into total war, the army needed all eyes on the emperor in his role as commander in chief.

It is hard to gauge how seriously the average Japanese took the divinity of the emperor, how to interpret this divinity, and to what degree the tension with evolutionary theory reverberated. But at least on the level of ideology, from the late 1930s the divinity—or at least a divine descent of the emperor—was taken more seriously by ideologues and the government than ever in Japan's history, and it did clash with evolutionary theory. At times, the thought police even arrested people for asserting the humanity of the emperor. For example, one police unit reported, "The suspect, a teacher at a higher women's school, when teaching 'on the evolution of living beings' . . . told students that our country has received an Imperial house of unbroken line since time immemorial, so this meant that the

Emperor was just a human being, hence violating the dignity of his Majesty.”¹¹⁵ Perhaps it was only a minority of propagandists and right-wing thinkers who seriously believed in the divinity of the emperor, but this minority dominated airtime in the late 1930s and 1940s.

EVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND JAPANESE WARTIME IDEOLOGY

The heightened tensions between evolutionary theory and the *kokutai* ideology pertain to understanding Japanese ideology in the early Shōwa period and, in particular, the Asia-Pacific War. Increased tensions with evolutionary theory were reflected in official formulations of government ideology from the late 1930s. Seiken members, including Kihira, as well as Inoue Tetsujirō, were influential in drafting the 1937 *Fundamentals of the National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongī*), which was one of the most important propaganda pieces of Japan’s wartime government and was distributed as a guidebook for teachers to use in schools. The *Fundamentals of the National Polity*, as well as the 1941 sequel, *The Way of Subjects* (*Shinmin no michi*), was an expression of imperial ideology, drawing on an eclectic mix of Confucian values, the Buddhist idea of self-denial, Bushidō, and mostly State Shintō. The text relied heavily on the *Kojiki* and made no attempt to interpret the myths of divine descent as anything less than literal. For example, the opening passages of the text states: “In our country, the two Augustnesses, Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto, are ancestral deities of nature and the deities, and the Emperor is the divine offspring of the Imperial Ancestor who was born of the two Augustnesses.”¹¹⁶ The *Fundamentals of the National Polity* stressed the divine descent of the emperor, absolute imperial rule, the timeless harmony of the Japanese with the emperor, and the duties of the Japanese as imperial subjects. The book also repudiated both socialism and liberalism as expressions of Western individualism, and hailed the harmony of the Japanese people with the gods and nature. A section on harmony states that through harmony and *musubi* (rather than struggle for survival and natural selection) there is “creation” and “development.”¹¹⁷

Despite its intention to clarify the *kokutai*, the book was hopelessly vague on a number of key issues. It stated that the emperor’s divinity was not to be considered as “God” in the Western (Christian) sense of the term (a phrasing that some ideologues found belittled the emperor), but did not explain much else. Similar to the ancient classics themselves, it did not explain clearly who “the Japanese people” were, but the text did state, “In the divine ages the deities of heaven brought forth ourselves and our homeland

as their fellow creatures."¹¹⁸ The superiority of the Japanese people was expressed in terms of their unique relationship with the emperor, with the gods, with nature, with each other, and for having a "pure and cloudless heart." It is also worth mentioning that the *Fundamentals of the National Polity* never talks about the Japanese in biological racial terms. This is probably the result of two conflicting notions of Japanese identity in the prewar period: as historian Oguma Eiji has demonstrated, there was an inherent tension between, on the one hand, the desire to express national superiority, and, on the other, the need to construct an ideal of harmony for Japan's colonial empire, and thus emphasize the mixed-race and thus Asian origins of the Japanese people.¹¹⁹ The more explicit message, that is, the divine descent of the imperial house and Japanese subjects, was reaffirmed to a larger public. *Fundamentals of the National Polity* revealed tensions with the theory of evolution, but stopped short of an outright rejection.

For most of prewar Japan, school textbooks presented the creation myths and the descent from heaven as literal truth, but also taught evolutionary theory. From the mid-1930s, however, there are many signs that the state, especially in the Ministry of Education, discouraged the teaching of evolutionary theory. The Ministry of Education invited antievolutionists such as Kakei Katsuhiko and Kihira Tadayoshi to fulfill important roles in formulating and disseminating ideology, and had established Seiken, which exerted significant ideological pressure on teachers not to teach evolution. It remains unclear, however, to what degree local schools and teachers followed Seiken's guidance not to teach evolution, or proactively rejected evolution in classrooms. There were also known instances of local schools taking the initiative themselves, even before the charged period of the 1930s. In October 1925, for example, the Third Higher School, affiliated with Kyoto University, abolished the Evolution Society (Shinkakai), a student study group, in which the socialist and evolutionary theorist Yamamoto Senji was actively involved. Coinciding with the Scopes Trial in the United States, the students, comparing their case with this trial, and complaining about the loss of freedom of study, stated: "The reality of the ban on teaching evolution is no longer a foreign problem."¹²⁰

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, articles on evolutionary theory disappeared from the newspapers and photographs of the emperor as biologist were no longer disseminated.¹²¹ From the late 1930s, and intensifying during the Pacific War, school textbooks and government propaganda disseminated not only the idea of divine origins but that the figure of the emperor himself was divine, or a "manifest" or living *kami* (*arahitogami*) and an absolute ruler over the divine country.¹²² In 1943, the Ministry of Education issued a warning to teachers to be "especially critical of evolutionary

theory.”¹²³ Several biologists, it should be mentioned, openly resisted the assaults on evolutionary theory.¹²⁴ Antievolutionary thought also found its way to commentaries on the *Fundamentals of the National Polity*. One biologist, for example, criticized evolutionary theory for its “resulting in ‘material civilization,’” and also stated:

Following the law of what is called the “struggle for survival” [*seizon kyōsō*], the individual has become able to do as he pleases without restrictions or bounds. This tendency has resulted in some becoming very rich and others becoming very poor, and the gap between them has become gradually larger. Thus, the problem of the gap between rich and poor emerged, and then finally, the struggle due to the opposition between classes. . . . Eventually, communist thought that under no circumstances allows for private property or capital slipped into the country.¹²⁵

This association of the “struggle for survival” with the West, Western imperialism, individualism, and capitalism, as well as with class struggle and Marxism—all anathema to Japan’s unique *kokutai*—became a dominant feature of Japanese state ideology.¹²⁶ Japanese ideology almost invariably argued for the spiritual and *moral* superiority of Japan, outside of, and rising above, the Western world of the struggle for survival. For many, the specter of the Japanese spirit, the emperor, and the *kokutai* as products of evolution from a mindless and random process of material elements, or the result of a struggle between amoral and atomic individuals, was unbearable—perhaps even unthinkable.

On the other hand, the Japanese state also continued to promote the idea of Japan as a modern and scientific nation, and skillfully used popular fascination with technology, especially on the part of the military, to ensure the public of Japan’s ultimate victory. As elsewhere, the idea of eugenics came to enjoy some popularity.¹²⁷ After the outbreak of the war with China in 1937, some proponents of a national eugenics, especially those aligned with the Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Kōseishō*), advocated policies that aimed at “improving” and enlarging the stock, and gained more ground. A National Eugenics Bill (*Kokumin yūseihō*) was eventually passed in 1940. Some eugenicists believed in the purity of the Yamato race, and that this purity ought to be maintained with eugenic methods. Eugenic discourse, however, should not be interpreted as a sign of a Darwinist approach in Japanese wartime ideology.¹²⁸ Eugenics had more to do with Mendelian genetics than with evolutionary theory per se. In Japan, as elsewhere, eugenics theory had a complex history with no inherent or straightforward ideological affiliation.¹²⁹ The Ministry of Health and Welfare, established in 1938, was not a very powerful ministry, and the views of some in this ministry

were not representative of Japanese wartime ideology. Even the ministry as a whole did not subscribe to the notion of a pure Japanese superior race. One significant tract published by this ministry, the "Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus," held that no race was pure, including the Japanese race, and it endorsed the view of Erwin Baelz (1849–1913), that the modern Japanese probably represented a mix of three racial strains: Ainu, Malay, and Mongoloid.¹³⁰ Nor can it be said that wartime Japan was particularly eugenically active: while Japan sterilized several hundred people, Nazi Germany, a country with around the same population, sterilized more than 360,000.¹³¹ Japan never developed a program such as the extermination of the mentally disabled or racial minorities as part of an "improvement" of the race, such as that carried out in Nazi Germany.

Crucially, eugenic thought also conflicted with the *kokutai* ideology and versions of it that advocated the superiority of the divine Japanese people. Improving the stock as one does with cattle undermined the notion of divine descent. Hence, imperial household minister Makino Chiyozō, a figure very close to Hirohito, expressed his misgivings about the proposed sterilization law saying it turned humans into animals and disrespected Japan's divine order.¹³² One politician in the government opposed sterilization on the grounds that this meant cutting off a line of divine descent, and in the 1940s the *kokutai* ideology seems to have prevented the eugenics law from being fully implemented.¹³³ Japan's leaders were unable to bridge the demands for "improvement" of the stock and the self-satisfying guarantee of divine superiority. The notion of a biologically pure and superior Japanese race never did become dominant or official ideology. Faced with ever more peoples under its rule, Japan struggled to find an appropriate ideology to account for its empire, for which the ideal of harmony between different Asian peoples was better suited. Also, even after it passed in 1940, the eugenics law was openly criticized inside and outside of government.¹³⁴

Opinions on the connections between evolutionary theory and war were also divided. In Europe, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and especially from around the time of World War I, there was a series of debates on the evolutionary function of war. While some theorists had proposed that war was nature's way of ensuring survival of the fittest, arguing for war's rootedness in nature was not necessarily an endorsement. So-called peace biologists argued that war was man-made, social, and contingent, and emphasized its disastrous biological effects by killing the youngest and fittest. In interwar Japan, peace biology theory became quite influential, through, among others, the famous socialist labor leader, professor, and politician Yamamoto Senji (1889–1929).¹³⁵ In 1930s Japan, legitimizing war with arguments from the struggle for survival was rare.¹³⁶

A much more popular and influential “scientific” argument for expansionism than Darwinism was Malthusianism (a pre-evolutionary theory): population pressure in Japan made occupying territory in Northeast Asia vital. When legitimizing expansionism and the empire by use of biological metaphors, though not in terms of evolution, it was said that Japan had a unique ability to “organically” assimilate different cultures.¹³⁷ And while today perhaps hard to accord with the harsh realities of Japanese occupation, the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was then usually legitimized in terms of harmony among Asians. The line of thinking was that with Japanese rule as the embodiment of the Confucian Kingly Way (*ōdō*), Japan demonstrated a noble type of leadership, which was contrasted with the Way of Force (*hadō*) of Western barbarians, who preyed on the weak for their material self-interests. In this context, the Way of Force was portrayed as a part of Western imperialism legitimized by the base struggle for survival or “the strong eat the weak” (*jakuniku kyōshoku*), and Japan’s mission of the “liberation of Asia” was to replace that Western barbarism with a new and Asian moral order based on harmony. Hence it was not the struggle for survival but Kropotkin’s mutual aid (*sōgo fujo*) that sometimes found its way into Japanese ideas of imperialism and Asian co-prosperity.¹³⁸

What emerges as dominant is a dual nature in Japanese ideology, a combination of religious nationalism *and* modernism, science, and technology, or “scientific nationalism.”¹³⁹ The Meiji pioneers had built a paradox in the nation’s modernization program: on the one hand, the nation was committed to modernization, science and technology; on the other, this brand of nationalism was built on the invented tradition of the divine origins of the imperial line and the nation—an “authenticity” that would provide a sense of continuity amidst the upheavals that modernization would bring. Evolutionary theory had always been difficult to reconcile with this second ideological pillar.

Perhaps nobody expressed this dual and contradictory nature—and the need for both poles of religion and science—more keenly than Emperor Hirohito himself. Exactly around the time of the Minobe incident in 1935, Hirohito allegedly told General Honjō Shigeru (1876–1945): “If we try to suppress science by ideology or faith [*shisō shinnen*], the progress of the world will come to a standstill. *The evolution theory, for instance, will be undermined.* However, ideology and faith are not unnecessary. Ideology and faith should develop on parallel lines.”¹⁴⁰

The fundamental tension between evolutionary theory and *kokutai* ideology showed itself to be manageable for most of prewar Japan, with the exception of the time around the Great Treason Incident of 1910. In the crisis of the 1930s, however, with the rise of the Left, a deteriorating

international situation, and the attempts to mobilize and unify the people under the emperor in a time of total war, the tensions among these fundamental contradictions in Japan's modernity were stretched to the limits, resulting in clashes. Promoting both science and State Shintō in schools seemed to have been a bit of a balancing act. Evolutionary theory was never forbidden outright in education, but neither did the pre-1945 Japanese state clarify that the official myths should be understood allegorically. On the contrary, in 1943, in an official instruction book for teachers, the Ministry of Education explained that a major goal was to guide children to both science and the myths by fostering curiosity, and when teaching the divine age, it should be made clear that the myths "explain the continuity between the divine tradition [*shinwa*] and history, and between men and gods. Because there is this continuity, our *kokutai*, our history is directly connected to the world of the gods."¹⁴¹

In the end, many issues remained unsolved. The Japanese state promoted Tennō-centrism and Shintō nationalism, but could not afford to abandon science. Japanese ideology never became the codified monolith that postwar observers thought it did (nor was Japan unique in its appeal to the legitimacy of the divine and the power of science and technology as a means for mobilization in war); it managed to harbor and mobilize scientific thought as well as a plurality of religious and philosophical currents. In the end, Japanese wartime ideology remained riddled with tensions and contradictions.

"OVERCOMING MODERNITY"

Japanese antievolutionary thought was also about a wider and deeper problem than that of the emperor, Shintō, and ideology. As can be seen in Kihira Tadayoshi's ideas, Japanese opposition to evolutionary theory expressed a pervading deep unease with modernity and loss of community felt among so many educated people and intellectuals during this period. The biologist Fukui Tamao (1891–1970) provided some illuminating observations:

People criticize the evolutionary theory they have learned in middle school and attack it, saying that humanity should live and prosper in harmony—that to reject others while advancing one's own position is morally questionable—or they go further and descend into the argument that saying that humans descended from apes brings humans down to the level of animals. Also, the mistaken idea has come up that today's hedonistic atmosphere and the lamentable situation of people always prioritizing satisfying their own desires is the result of this theory [of evolution], and there are even those who associate [evolutionary theory] with materialism and reject it.¹⁴²

Fukui's comments show his belief that many blamed evolutionary theory for individualism, selfishness, competition, and even "hedonism"—in other words, a loss of community amidst the rise of modernity.

The "Overcoming Modernity" debate, held by a diverse and leading group of writers, philosophers, literary critics, and scientists in Kyoto in the summer of 1942 reveals some wider dimensions of antievolutionary thought. While the significance of this symposium has sometimes been overestimated, many intellectuals shared the sentiments that were expressed there. Although it has often been overlooked, science was a major concern for the participants; this focus should not be surprising, since, after all, modernity was unthinkable without science.¹⁴³ Participants in the conference identified the separation of religion and science as a core feature of modernity, and urged the retrieval of a unity of religion and science.

As Japan found itself in total war, these intellectuals felt the need to rethink the course that modernization and Westernization had taken in Japan since 1868. The participants in the symposium were divided over what "modernity" actually was, and unsure how to overcome it. The conundrum was that they saw modernity as an alien transplant from the West, but one that had become an integral part of Japanese society, which they deemed a deeply unsettling fact. Somehow, modernity had to be "overcome"—externally by expelling the West from Asia, and internally, not by returning to the past, but by the creation of a new culture. Modernization had brought many divisions: division of labor as well as divisions between matter and mind, between the human and the divine, and between science, religion, art, and philosophy. Modernity had also brought individualism, a Western and divisive idea. A fundamental unity that they believed had characterized Japanese life was lost, and had to be restored. As philosopher Shimomura Toratarō (1902–1995) said: "There must be unification. That is the concrete problem of overcoming modernity."¹⁴⁴

For the participants, science harbored universal truth, but at the same time, it also expressed a particular, Western worldview. The differentiation of science from religion, philosophy, and history (which Shimomura thought defined the modernity of science) divided what was once a unified Japanese worldview. Intellectuals especially lamented the materialism associated with modern science. Kikuchi Seishi (1902–1974), a nuclear physicist from Tokyo Imperial University, expressed exactly what was at stake: "If there is nothing besides such a [materialist] scientific worldview, then the Japanese spirit and the idea of the *kokutai* will disappear."¹⁴⁵ Matter as such could simply not be claimed as Japanese. Many intellectuals thought that modern science, through industrialization and capitalism (i.e., "machine civilization") had led to a separation of man from nature. Among the sciences, it was evolutionary the-

ory that was singled out as the epitome of Western, individualist, materialist, and progressivist thinking. For many intellectuals in wartime Japan, Darwin had become both too Western and too modern.

For these reasons, Kikuchi Seishi, while not denying evolutionary theory outright, wanted to separate evolutionary theory from materialism. Similarly, the Catholic thinker Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko expressed doubts about the universality of evolution: "Apart from the problem of biological evolutionary theory, I am against the evolutionary way of thinking. The existence of the soul is a case in point. Understanding the soul is something for metaphysics."¹⁴⁶ Suzuki Shigetaka, a historian, criticized all models of progress and development, including evolution, and concluded: "perhaps the overcoming of modernity in history lies in the overcoming of concepts of development."¹⁴⁷ Hayashi Fusao (1903–1975), formerly a Marxist writer and literary critic who had been imprisoned several times in the early 1930s before turning more nationalistic and becoming a vocal supporter of the war, summed it all up: "I don't want to acknowledge evolutionary theory. I am tired of the evolutionist way of looking at things. I am much more impressed with the knowledge that in the world there are more things that do not change than things that change. . . . Evolutionary theory is the superstition of modernity."¹⁴⁸

Religion played an important role in the participants' skepticism about evolution. Most intellectuals present regretted secularization as a product of Westernization, but were unsure how to bring religion back into Japanese life. Hayashi Fusao echoed the official state propaganda by advocating a return to Shintō and the restoration of the lost unity with the sacrality of the emperor. Nishitani Keiji, a Buddhist philosopher, argued for an oriental (Zen Buddhist) "nothingness" as the basis for a new culture, but he also cherished descent from the *kami*: "The 'pure and clear mind' is at once the source of the mind that appears when one extinguishes self-interest and that which circulates within state life as the intentions of the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, just as it flows within our blood in our status *as descendants of the gods*."¹⁴⁹ Nishitani was not the only Buddhist in this period who became ambivalent about evolutionary theory as embodying the ills of modernity.¹⁵⁰

In short, different reactions against evolutionary theory almost always showed the same larger concerns about modernity, education, ideas, and the loss of community, national unity, and above all, a sense of unease over secularization, that religion had been separated from other spheres of life.¹⁵¹ During a time of profound political and ideological crises and war, many intellectuals saw evolutionary theory as the theoretical fountain of everything that was wrong with modernity.

CONCLUSION

In 1930s and 1940s Japan, evolutionary theory was blamed for everything that was wrong with modernity: individualism, materialism, Western imperialism, Marxism, consumerism, capitalism, and even promiscuity. While Japan shared antipathy to these subjects with antievolutionism in other countries, early Shōwa Japanese critiques of evolution added two dimensions. First, an ecological dimension (shared by both Ishikawa Sanshirō and Kihira Tadayoshi): modern science, and evolutionary theory in particular, left in its wake a disenchanted nature and produced knowledge that was intimately bound up with the capitalist subjugation of nature and the exploitation of other humans. And second, as can be seen most clearly in Kihira's case, Japanese intellectuals added to this argument an anticolonial critique: although Japanese antievolutionism often shared similar concerns with other countries, in Japan, intellectuals blamed the West for imposing this uniform "disenchanted nature" on Japan since the nineteenth century, thereby destroying *local* community and meaning. In combination, these principles fueled the attack on evolutionary theory. What stands out is the ideological continuum between the critiques from the extreme Left and the conservative Right, with both targeting capitalism, exploitation, and the upheavals of modernization.

Attempts to overcome modernity and vanquish Darwin were always inherently paradoxical and incomplete, however: Japanese religious reactions against evolutionary theory and modernity were almost always formulated with very modern theoretical sources, such as vitalism, or by borrowing arguments against natural selection theory from Marxists and anarchists. As the symposium in Kyoto had revealed, there was no answer to the problem of how to "overcome" Darwin and modernity. Within a short time, however, these theoretical concerns were taken over by events on the battlefield and in the reality of defeat.