

COMPETITION AND HARMONY

Kato Hiroyuki's Naturalism and Ethics for Modern Japan

Do-hyung Kim and Eun-young Park♦

Abstract: This essay draws on the limitations of materialistic naturalism and ethical aspects attempted by Kato Hiroyuki in the 19th century Japan. In order to overcome the crisis of Western entry into East Asia in the 19th century, Kato Hiroyuki argued that Japan must achieve the development of a modern country through 'Harmony between People'. He studied Western state theory, especially through Bluntschli's political science and state theory, and criticized the Western state theory based on social contracts or natural rights as having an unproven metaphysical basis and insisted on the validity of the naturalist state theory which sees the state as an organism. However, when Kato realized that the organism state theory evolving through competition could harm the 'harmony between people' of the modern Japan, he argued that true evolution could only be possible through competition for harmony of community. In the end, he failed to overcome anti-metaphysical metaphysics called 'materialistic naturalism', as the Western social contract theory or natural rights theory he criticized.

Keywords: Harmony between People, Kato Hiroyuki, Materialistic Naturalism, Modern State, Naturalistic Ethics, Organism State Theory.

♦**Dr Do-hyung Kim** is Assistant Professor of Department of Japanese Language and Literature at Sejong University, Seoul. His area of research is History of Modern Japan. E-mail: artenet@sejong.ac.kr

Dr Eun-young Park (Corresponding Author) is a Research Professor of AEAS at Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul. Her area of research is Modern Japanese Thought. E-mail: golopark@skku.edu

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1. Introduction

Transition to a modern state after the model of France, Germany, and England, has been a common task in the non-Western world since the 19th century. Japan was the earliest country in East Asia to successfully build a modern state. Kato Hiroyuki (1836-1916) was one of Japanese intellectuals who tried to achieve Western modernity in Japan as a national project during his life. He first introduced the Western constitutional state and parliamentary system to Japan to build knowledge necessary to create Japan as a modern state.

Nevertheless, scholars' evaluation of Kato was not very positive. The reason was that Kato conceived an excessively authoritarian state and advocated philosophical and political theories that supported government-led political structures. After World War II, many Japanese scholars criticized the origin of Japan's transformation into an imperialist and fascist state. They paid attention to Kato's state theory and philosophical thoughts. Kato was always politically critical of activists and progressive theorists of liberal movement of civil rights. Instead, Kato put the state first rather than civil rights.

Kato was not academically supported by either the conservative or the progressive party because Kato's theory was ambiguous and incomplete. However, this theoretical imperfection was regarded as an important reason for the underestimation of Kato. This was likely to be caused by Kato himself. Kato tended to be very obsessed with theoretical consistency. In other words, Kato theoretically and ideologically justified and systematized tasks or values in his time. His obsession with consistency made Kato's ideological ambiguity and imperfection stand out. Kato's later theory was focused on the relationship between individuals and society (state) as a considerable unity, similar to Confucian worldview. However, Kato attempted to find similarity of Confucianism with his thoughts by focusing only on a specific part of the enormous ideological system of Confucianism. When Kato was active as a scholar, the world intelligence system from the end of the 19th to the early 20th century was greatly influenced by German scholars. Therefore, Japan's establishment of a modern state was influenced by German scholars (Solem).

As Kato was also a scholar located in this intellectual trend, it was insufficient to understand his theory by merely relying on Anglo-American political thoughts or philosophical theories. The historical context and political system in which Kato lived were likely to be overlooked when only the philosophical system was focused on. Overlooking historical context is likely to make Kato's ideological imperfections stand out. Thus, a closer examination is needed. This paper focuses on these points and examines Kato's thoughts in an overview without any political prejudice, reviews the ideological position of Kato in modern Japan, and presents Kato's theory of a balanced coexistence of competition and harmony between people.

2. Task of Recovering 'Harmony between People'

Kato first began studying Western philosophy in 1860 when he entered 'Bansho Shirabesō,' a Western research institution in the shogunate. Before that, Kato learned ran-gaku. However, it was limited to Western language and military studies. Ran-gaku did not teach Western political thoughts, philosophy, or *Staatslehre* (state theory in German).

Kato's first book, *Tonarigusa* (Draft about Neighbour), was written in 1861. It was intended to create an idea of breaking through the political crisis faced by Japan at the time. Kato wanted to use Western countries as a model for Japan. Specifically, Kato emphasized the importance of restoring 'harmony between people.' The advancement of Western forces to East Asia after the mid-19th century was the most serious crisis faced by the Tokugawa shogunate. Many politicians and intellectuals insisted on hard-line measures to overcome this crisis, such as augmentation of armaments or exclusion of Western powers. Under such situation, Kato understood the nature of the crisis faced by Japan as a political issue. He saw that the best way to overcome this crisis was to recover the lost 'harmony between people.'

In *Tonarigusa*, Kato boldly suggested that to restore 'harmony between people,' Japan should rely on 'the politics of parliament' like the Western system with institutions such as Western constitutionalism and the parliamentary system. Kato proposed that Japan could develop a state of 'harmony between people' by

accepting Western political system that made the West wealthy. *Tonarigusa* was not a full-fledged academic work as Kato did not sufficiently research Western political thoughts when he wrote the book. Still, it was sufficient to show his initial political orientation. Since then, Kato's intention for 'harmony between people' has been consistently flowing at the base despite his numerous theoretical transformations and changes in political position.

3. Acceptance and Denial of Theory of Natural Rights

After the Meiji Restoration, Kato studied Western political science or state theory. Kato most often discussed works of Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881). Bluntschli's theory of natural law took a very critical stance on Rousseau's theory of social contract, which was perceived "a non-convincing theory as it does not offer historical evidence" (260). This point of view can be applied equally to Hobbes' as well as Rousseau' versions of social contract theory. There was a difference between Hobbes' and Rousseau' versions of social contract theory on the degree to which they recognized the absoluteness of state (sovereign) authority. However, Rousseau and Hobbes agreed that autonomous individuals created a political harmony that was beneficial to their mutual interests (Singer 72).

On the other hand, Bluntschli denied the creation of authority through people's consented transfer of rights, the sovereignty of the state as the collective will of the people, and the creation of the state through social contracts. Instead, Bluntschli emphasized the concept of sovereignty of the 'state' itself as an organism in which the monarch, the prime minister, and the parliament organically performed their respective roles. Although Bluntschli denied the social contract theory, he did not reject the natural law. He explained constitutional monarchy and the parliamentary system based on the natural right of humans. Like Bluntschli, Kato also accepted the modern state theory based on natural human rights. Kato introduced Bluntschli's theory to apply the Western modern state theory to Japan. Kato's was a private tutor to the emperor about Western studies. Thus, Bluntschli's theory had a great influence on Japan. As Kato insisted in his first work, he thought that applying these Western political institutions to Japan was the way to achieve 'harmony between people.'

These theories that Kato introduced, however, were used in the direction of disturbing 'harmony between people.' These theories also intertwined with political changes in Japan. Kato seemed to think so at least. In the early Meiji period in Japan, numerous studies by Western political philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Bluntschli, Locke, and Spencer were introduced to Japan at once. Thus, different theories coexisted, providing the basis for various political arguments in Japan. Bluntschli's organism state theory that Kato introduced was based on natural rights but denied the social contract theory (Shieshu 134). However, it became known by the political progressive as a way to justify state ideology mainly based on the theory of natural rights (Shinobu 8). Kato realized that political thoughts and system based on natural rights were threatening the order of Japan and the emperor. Kato's understanding of the theory of natural rights was fundamentally different from that of Hobbes' or Rousseau's in that the existence and stability of the state were the most important for Kato. Unlike secular monarchs in England and France, natural rights could not precede the presence of the Japanese emperor in that the emperor should maintain its divine nature as well as the form of a secular monarch a modern state (Kim). Kato concluded that 'harmony between people' could not be achieved in Japan through Western ideologies or methods in which natural rights became the basic principle of the constitution of the state. Kato started to attack natural rights based on 'no evidence' of natural rights in the same way that he attacked social contract based on 'no evidence.' Kato's position led to his denial of the theory of natural rights itself following the acceptance of the theory of evolution. Kato decided to attack metaphysics (absolute existence or human beings are inherently given rights by nature) that was based on the theory of natural rights. Kato used Charles Darwin's evolutionary biology for the attack against metaphysics, which was the starting point of his naturalism.¹ In this way, his

¹The theory of evolution that influenced Kato is often referred to as Spencer's theory of social evolution, but this is not true; he was influenced by evolutionary biology. Looking at Kato's research notes, it can be seen that Kato could only read German and read Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* in German

theory of rights and state based on naturalism led to the publication of *The New Theory of Human Rights* in 1882 (Meiji 15) and *Competition for the Rights of the Strong* in 1893 (Meiji 26). Through these two books, Kato's discussion on the theory of natural rights in the past had drastically changed.

4. Competition and Evolution

The theory of evolutionary biology was popular when Kato was active as a scholar. This theory provided the most empirical basis for Kato who just began to attack the theory that humans are inherently granted with rights. In *The New Theory of Human Rights*, Kato argued that people were not born with natural rights that were originally given by nature. In the beginning, humans became strong through animal-like competition in a brutal state. A strong person continued to maintain the power. Kato continued to argue that the strong person 'granted' the rights to the majority of weak people to maintain his/her power. This was the rule of world operation called 'the survival of the fittest.' Humans changed from armed competition to the stage of mental power competition and then achieved a civilized society (37-38). The theory that explained the evolution of society in terms of the law of evolution through competition was popular around the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Kato also tried to establish a social order with the emperor who was the strongest among the strongest through the theory of evolution. However, a fundamental flaw emerged. If human beings are in the same state of competition as animals, the stability of any form of social order could not be guaranteed. In other words, according to the law of evolution, the strongest person should give up his/her power when a person with a more superior power (or armed force) appears.

Kato had to consider how social harmony could be achieved from this principle of competition. In his book *Competition for the Rights of the Strong*, Kato emphasized differences in the natural state of humans (male and female, strong and weak, etc.). He asserted that humans should accept differences in power and social order as such differences are based on natural laws (67).

translations. Kato did know Spencer's name, but apparently did not know the specifics of his theory.

Kato conceived a political order based on the 'real' natural law (i.e., evolution) to deny the theory of natural rights based on metaphysical grounds. This political order was applied to a certain level of community, that is, the order within the state. Kato said that the internal order of the state was tolerated because the state was still in unlimited competition with external states. Therefore, the acceptance of the power of the strong by the weak in the community ultimately served for interests of the weak. Through this, the law of unlimited competition and social harmony can coexist (31).

5. Separation of Naturalism from Ethics

Kato tried to find conditions under which 'harmony between people' could be socially possible in competition and evolution. The theory of evolution and its basic theory, naturalism, could pose a serious threat to Japan's established order. However, 'harmony between people' could not be achieved only by theoretical explanation. Naturalism has the potential to threaten the identity of the representative of the Japanese state (i.e., the emperor) who has a mythological background in that naturalism considers all humans to be equal and that naturalism has the potential to eliminate differences between animals and humans. Hence, Kato's naturalism led to his denial of all religions. In this process, he had to seek how to secure the legitimacy of the emperor as the 'strongest' man within the natural law of evolution.

In *Competition for the Rights of the Strong*, Kato's answered this question by promoting separation of naturalism from ethics, arguing that 'exploitation' of slaves, women, and children is a natural phenomenon that appears in evolution and someday rights are 'granted' to healthy people. Hence, Kato focused on promoting stable ethics of social order. It was an apparent contradiction. However, Kato attempted to separate social ethics from natural state to justify this contradictory 'natural state.'

Until the mid-1890s, Kato had to explain that artificial activities needed to stabilize discriminatory natural state for the coexistence of natural order (discriminatory natural state) and artificial order (social stability and harmony). To resolve such an ideological problem, Kato paid attention to Japanese studies on

Confucianism, especially those of Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728), who refuted neo-Confucianism that conceived the social order as an analogy of the natural order (Masao). Instead, he suggested that the social order is completely artificial; human rights are based on real legalism that is the 'law' approved by the emperor = state-power based rule of law, not based on natural legalism. It was the reason why real legalism emphasized human-specific behaviour regarding the enactment of laws which was based on human 'action' rather than nature. Sorai's argument must have given a new inspiration for Kato: "Sorai's argument seems to make sense in that Tao in Confucianism lies in courtesy, punishment, music, and loyalty artificially created by preceding emperors for the stability of the world, not in nature like neo-Confucianism scholars proposed" (Kato, "Confucius," 9).

Kato was aware of the contradictions contained in this logic. As long as naturalism and ethics were separated, Kato had no choice but to stand on again human 'specificity'. However, it contradicted his support of the theory of evolution, that is, the logic that refuted the Western theory of natural rights by denying the 'nobility' of humans. To this end, Kato started his research on the evolutionary process of moral law after the publication of *Competition for the Rights of the Strong*. He focused on drawing ethics within the naturalist theory. Kato's later three-part series on moral law was his effort to resolve this problem. Kato presented two important concepts – 'unique egoistic fundamental drive' (*trieb* in German) and 'three-stage organism theory' – in the 3rd edition of *The Supplementary Revision of Moral Law Evolution* published in 1903. The emergence of these two concepts completed Kato's later thoughts.

6. Nature and Ethics

It was not easy to explain the development of ethics while adhering to the naturalist position. This was because these two contradicting phenomena of competition and harmony between people must coexist within the time flow of evolution. To this end, Kato began to discuss the premise that an organism has "a drive to achieve its interests is a self-evident fact that usually does not require proof:"

Looking at the source of physiological and psychological actions of each individual, all came from this fundamental drive. Such fundamental drive also keeps developing as long as the individual's uniqueness dictates. In other words, as long as a position is needed within the influence of power, the fundamental drive is activated regardless of the understanding of surrounding objects (Kato, *Supplementary*, 2-3).

In this way, Kato was able to place 'logical, understanding, or volitional' 'selfishness' on top of biological, physiological, and psychological objective forces by thoroughly setting drive based on 'selfishness' (Kato, *Supplementary*, 132). In other words, that 'activates' from human 'drive' could be regarded as expression of 'selfishness.' Kato suggested that the 'drive' inherent in organisms was manifested through three stages: 1) 'single-celled organisms,' 2) 'multiple-celled organisms formed from multiple single-celled organisms,' and 3) 'plants and animals colonies formed from multiple-celled organisms.' The 'third-stage organism' includes the 'organism' that has the 'drive' (Kato, *Supplementary*, 516).

The introduction of these two concepts brought about a significant change in Kato's theory of ethics. Kato did not completely deny ethics as 'a tool necessary to promote the maintenance and progress of human society.' However, Kato confined ethics to the role of maintenance and progress of society within subsidiary roles of 'supplementation' and 'correction' of the "moral law that has been created and developed through natural selection" (Kato, *Supplementary*, 164-165). In other words, the 'natural' aspect was emphasized rather than the 'active' aspect in the formation of ethics.

Kato often cited Sorai's theory of ethics to bridge the contradiction between naturalism and ethics as seen before. Still, he re-evaluated Sorai. First of all, Kato said that it was a mistake for Sorai to equate morality with pure artifacts and compare mechanics to making machines (Kato, *Supplementary*, 175). Kato also discussed the relationship between 'selfishness' and 'altruism' as follows. 'Altruistic behaviour' for the 'individual' (a second-stage organism) became 'selfish behaviour' for the 'state' (a third-stage organism). In other words, 'moral law' was only an expression of the uniqueness of an organism while 'selfishness' and 'altruism' were 'organically' combined without the process of

'degeneration.' In this way, Kato proposed that 'altruism' entirely belonged to the natural law (Kato, *Supplementary*, 349-350). He realized an inherent unification of ethics and the theory of evolution. He considered that controlling 'animal needs' with human uniqueness and specificity was unnecessary. At this point, Kato was able to return to his naturalist position: "It is not appropriate to study human mind and body, knowing that a human has gradually evolved from a lower animal by natural selection. Human beings became superior species, finally reaching the status of humans (Kato, *Supplementary*, 11).

Nature and Ethics, published in 1912, was the ultimate achievement of fully implementing naturalism up to the dimension of ethics. It was a representative work of Kato's later thoughts. In this book, Kato clarified that ethics was included in the principles of the evolution theory (natural law). First of all, in the heading of the book, Kato suggested that "all disciplines are the studies of the only nature" and "ethics must study ethical natural laws" because "the universe is the only nature and the only nature is the universe" (11-12). Furthermore, at the end of the book, Kato argues that the 'natural law' is the only grand law of nature that governs the entire universe as it functions in various fields. Thus, the natural law becomes a natural material law, a natural mental law, a natural physiological law, a natural psychological law, a natural social law, and a natural moral law (361).

Kato described the reason why 'ethics' belonged to 'nature' as follows. The "unique egoistic fundamental drive," which is originated from the 'cosmic body,' is equipped as 'uniqueness' within an organism. The organism evolves in the direction of 'completing' this 'uniqueness.' "We humans can survive only through the mutual cooperation of all single cells that are constituent molecules." However, this is "not a true altruistic action, but a selfish action." That is why a single cell body must form a multiple single-celled body to 'complete' the 'uniqueness' (122-124). Likewise, the mutual 'altruism' of human beings with a multiple-celled body and their loyalty to the emperor and the country 'develops' the 'selfish drive' of the state, a 'colony of multiple-celled bodies.' It is nothing but uniqueness of humans who constitute the state like cells constitute a body (135-137). An

individual's 'unique egoistic fundamental drive' can be 'sufficiently achieved' (128) in the country and the individual's "completion of the egoistic fundamental drive" becomes "the happiness of national survival" (357). In the above logic development, Kato explained concepts of 'the unique egoistic fundamental drive' and the 'three-stage organism theory' in connection with each other.

7. Materialistic Naturalism: Anti-Metaphysical Metaphysics

The 'evolution' of Kato's ethics led to debates in Japan at the time. A representative example was a debate with Tetsujiro Inoue (1855-1944). Specifically, Kato viewed evolution as ethics while conforming to the selfish 'drive' of living things. In contrast, Inoue sought the source of ethics in returning to the 'body' of the world (grand law in Sung Confucianism), which was the source of the 'drive.' This debate was often defined as the confrontation between a materialist and an idealist (Hiroto 202). However, it was clear that they all presupposed some 'drive,' a concept that was difficult to prove in natural science.

In this respect, Kato and Inoue's discussions were built on concepts, which could not be proved in natural science. They were considered metaphysical. This contradicted Kato's monistic 'naturalism.' Materialistic naturalism that Kato had been pursuing after 1880 was finally logically broken. More accurately, Kato failed to overcome the contradiction in the end. Kato was criticized by many commentators for this contradiction. Later, Kato published his book *Theory of Responsibility* in 1915 as a supplementary edition of *Nature and Ethics* and defended his position as 'scientific' based on natural science. However, it was not a very valid defence.

In short, Kato used human's 'unique fundamental egoistic derive' as a 'self-evident basis' of his naturalism but failed to prove it in natural science. Another problem with Kato's theory was that most of the 'self-evident evidence' from most ethical and ideological systems could not be proved in natural science. Many scholars have already pointed out that theories of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke that are still used as the basis for many theoretical studies in modern political thoughts are not necessarily based on 'self-evident evidence' (Singer 74). Therefore, Kato's

attempt to refute the basis of the natural law theory was appropriate. It was not necessarily wrong to make selfishness the basis of his theory. Kato argued that he could prove it in natural science. In other words, Kato's theory was meaningful as he argued that his theory could be verified by the advancement of science, even if it was impossible in his time.

Rather, the problem was that most of Kato's works had a clear political motive in the historical context. The consistent purpose of Kato's works as a whole was to solve various challenges raised in the process of building a modern state in Japan. His fundamental aim was to create order through 'harmony between people.' Kato wanted not only the political order within Japan, but also the harmony between Western theories and the Japanese historical reality. Internally, he tried a monistic worldview, the harmony between competition and order. Kato attempted to establish ethics that could be derived from materialism. Kato also contributed to making the emperor as Japan's representative monarch with an empirical historical identity, not a mythical identity. Although his naturalism did not emphasize unfounded and blind loyalty to the emperor, there were several aspects that contradicted it theoretically.

8. Conclusion

Competition and harmony between people were fundamentally out of sync concepts. Therefore, Kato's attempt to ideologically derive an appropriate 'ethical' basis for the balanced coexistence of competition and harmony between people was inevitable. However, it seemed to be a reckless attempt. The logical contradiction from such an attempt is always a philosophical task that is still challenging to explain consistently.

Proponents of the theory of evolution that Kato brought in, such as Darwin, Haeckel (1834-1919), and Spencer, were mostly dualist. They could not completely rule out the metaphysical basis. They used 'nature' from scientific discoveries of the time as the basis for their thoughts. However, they could not clearly explain what the 'nature' was. Most modern and Western theories were based on metaphysics. Kato who criticized metaphysics unwittingly relied on 'materialism.' Therefore, Kato turned to 'anti-metaphysical metaphysics.'

The reason Kato could not overcome this contradiction might have a historical context. Kato's idea was to derive ethics from the natural state of human society, especially in Japan, a single 'state.' The foundation of 'nature' that Kato assumed was not beyond the scope of human-centred metaphysics as it was not a question of harmony between nature and humans from the beginning, but a question of harmony between humans within a natural state.

Today, with the development of natural sciences, we face an era where biology and physics have to explain problems of our minds and ethics. This situation is different from Kato's time as we have enough knowledge not to repeat scientific errors that Kato made. However, it is questionable whether harmony between nature and human ethics is working well now. Problems such as the recent pandemic and climate change raise fundamental issues for post-modern human-centred worldview and ethics. Do advanced natural sciences at present time provide us with a satisfactory ethical basis and system without a metaphysical premise? It is difficult to say that our knowledge of nature is 'evolving' to the extent that we can overcome contradictions of Kato's theory. Thus, re-evaluating Kato's metaphysical premise of 'nature' provides significant implications.

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