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“Philosophy”- power of thinking for our sustainable future

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Another sad and terrible case of child abuse last month! Despite her desperate efforts to contact public channels and let them know her agony, our society, to our great shame, failed to save the life of this 10-year-old from the parental child abuse!! Something seems to be wrong with today’s Japanese society! As regards misconducts of public entities, we also saw in the past months many shameful behavior of the national government; sloppy public surveys of company employees work hours, years of fake employment rate report of the disabilities, an irresponsible report on what is called “Technical Interns” from abroad. These repeated misconducts bitterly ruined the credibility of Japan’s statistical data.

Why do we so often see governmental misconducts these days? As regards statistic data errors, they may be caused, to some extent, by scarcity of allocated budget and staff because the current government put more emphasis on short-term economic issues and do not pay much attention to those basic and important (but unglamorous) role of government, namely, keeping sound national data for policy making/assessment. Some blame the government culture, where nobody, including government officials and politicians, takes responsibility of organizational decisions that they were involved in. Others point out that the ways of life of current Japanese people have been critically changed, greedily seeking only for benefits and convenience that they can enjoy while losing what is most important for human beings. It seems that people are busy making money and do not have room to think of others or of their community. They pay even less attention to the current crises of the environment, on which our very life is based.

In response to numerous shameful affairs happening in today’s Japanese society, some sensible persons consider that our society lacks “philosophy”. Exactly! In our current society, people are becoming more egoistic and they do not mind others so long as they themselves can get money to enjoy the present moment. The selfishness prevails in the society instead of healthy social philosophy of old days. The lack of philosophy will lead to various misconducts and mismanagement like above mentioned ones.

For Japanese people, the term “philosophy” sounds like something scholastic. In fact, philosophy is the act of quest for basic principles of life, and it requires difficult book readings. On the other hand, “philosophy” means in our daily life a belief that one gains from their experiences of life, or a basic thinking penetrating through one’s life. If so, any adult may have their own

“philosophy” coming from their past experience whatever it is. If so, then how should we cultivate philosophical thinking in young people with shorter life experiences?

Unfortunately, Japanese school curriculums up to high school do not have *Philosophy*. Instead, we have *Ethics*, but such esoteric themes like “*What is life?*” would not be discussed in the classroom. Of course, some colleges and universities have Philosophy courses, but humanities courses are not valued these days and we cannot expect much from school education. As for myself, I learnt what I consider sensible ways of thinking through book stories, words and deeds of my parents and other adults. When I grew up, I learnt a lot from my job and it helped me develop my own “philosophy”. These days, some companies encourage discussion among employees how they should behave as a human being. This may sound strange but those companies fully realize that employee development is a key to the company success.

Philosophy is not for AI, but only possible for humans. In our effort of developing sustainable decarbonized societies, we should put more emphasis on philosophy along with science and technology. Recently, a scholar of robotics found out that university students today tend to accept given information without questioning. She warned against the current education and emphasized the importance of fostering creativity as well as abilities of critical thinking, which only humans could do. Decline of thinking power may have been caused in part by heavy use of smart-phones. As people become more dependent on AI and smart-phones, the ability of thinking may further decline. At a turning point of our society, we should be fully aware of the power of thinking as a critical basis of human society.