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Ethics is a key to discuss the environment

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Since Prime Minister Suga's statement last October, decarbonization has been widely discussed among government members, experts, and business people. These discussions, however, are mostly about technology and costs, and few are about the vision of the future society, its ethical basis, or values. This poses a concern about the future of this country. Having seen deteriorated ethics prevailing in the public domain (forgetful politicians leaving Fukushima behind, clever government officials keen on reading between lines, and big companies attempting to conceal internal wrongdoings systematically), I am more concerned about the vision-less decarbonization discussion fatally lacking a sense of ethics/morality.

I will give you one example. On 13 May, RITE¹, commissioned by METI², submitted to a government committee a result of their scenario assumption/calculation³ seemingly supporting the METI's policy of maintaining nuclear and thermal power generation. The report, without showing the premises of their calculation, indicated that, if renewable energy is introduced 100%, the energy price will be almost four times higher than the current price. METI, based on this calculation, intended to reflect their energy policy to the government's basic energy plan which is to be amended soon in response to Prime Minister Suga's statement. Facing strong criticism from NPOs and environmental research institutes as well as by the public, METI modified the report and came up with another set of figures which indicates that the cost of solar power generation in 2030 would be the lowest of all energy options. This example reveals METI's epistocratic attitude, discussing only among the knowers. Their closed policymaking process made people feel anxious about the future energy of this country and increased public distrust of the government's energy policy.

¹ Research Institute of Innovative Technology for Earth

² Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

³ <https://www.rite.or.jp/system/en/global-warming-ouyou/download-data/E-202106analysisaddver.pdf>

Besides, the act of this research institute under METI presenting with a misleading figures seems to be against the ethics of scientists. Regrettably, they neglected their responsibility of presenting a scientific justification of their results, and what is worse, they failed to act faithfully and exercise professional ethics as scientists. Further, it is impermissible that the public discussion is based on such an ambiguous argument. METI, partly reflecting the modified calculation result, submitted the draft amendment of the basic energy plan, but nuclear and thermal power generation is still there, which will make it difficult to achieve the 2030 and 2050 reduction targets. The draft plan will be publicized for comments. However, the public comment system of this country has become a mere façade, so we are not sure if they are appropriately reflected in the actual policy.

Today, ecocide (massive destruction of environment and ecosystems) is widely recognized in many countries (but it is yet to be discussed and has not become even a topic in Japan). A group of international law experts requested ICC (International Criminal Court) to apply ecocide to substantial environmental destruction as a serious international crime. In France, suggested by the Citizen's Convention for Climate, ecocide is defined as "intentional environmental destruction causing long time serious damage on water, air, and soil at a national level." The French National Assembly approved the ecocide bill with punitive measures applied to individuals and corporations.

To tackle increasingly complex environmental issues, we need to employ various measures including legal measures. Especially in this globalized world, resorting to legal actions, in addition to political and diplomatic measures, would be useful and inevitable under certain circumstances. However, there might be other solutions than those confrontational approaches. Considering that climate change and serious environmental destructions are critical issues for our life and society, we sincerely wish that politicians, government officials, entrepreneurs, and scientists share a sense of ethics as a human. We believe that our ethical attitude, humanity, and integrity should be the main power base in addressing various social issues including environmental issues.