

## “Deep in Thought” – “On Education” – “A Premise for Living”

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### Deep in Thought

What does it mean to be deep in thought? Without doubt, a face deep in contemplation has a certain beauty to it. But the beauty of someone pouring the totality of themselves into one thing—of that wholehearted devotion—is different from the beauty of someone intent on, say, their job, sport, or study, in that it has a touch of shadow to it. It is the beauty of a harried beast with nowhere left to run, evoking a tragic quality, all the more so because the thinker themselves is unaware of it: this is what looks beautiful to the observer.

Yet at the same time, the contemplative face also has a certain ugliness. Probably it stems from the thinker being trapped in that corner, so to speak—brought to a complete standstill. Which is to say that, in one sense, captive as they are to a fixed idea, the thinker has lost their freedom. They may well be going through hell in their contemplation, sometimes even staking their life on it; but regardless, an observer may in contrast find them foolish, even a derisory figure.

People have a natural aversion to getting so deep into something that they reach a dead end. Throughout our lives we experience few such times trapped like that, but nonetheless we know such deep contemplation is an important—or rather, *essential*—part of being human. I believe this is because it is, in fact, the only way people can grasp lived ideas.

The act of thinking *of* something is more emotional and less precise than thinking *about* something. As the expression ‘deep in thought’ also suggests, it is sometimes an extremely vague concept, possibly implying self-indulgence. But for that very reason, compared to thinking *about* something, thinking *of* something is less compartmentalised, involving more aspects of our humanity.

If ‘thinking about’ employs our faculties of reason, ‘thinking of’ must primarily be based in feeling. At their extremes, the former can devolve into abstract intellectual games divorced from reality, while the latter may descend into a more experiential self-absorption.

But even though we may distinguish the two forms of thinking in such a way, these manifestations of the human spirit always complement each other as two sides of the same coin, as it were. Thinking about something refines our first impressions of it, while reflecting on an initial appraisal gives us a more holistic view—and we unconsciously repeat this

iterative process. Both modes of thought are mistaken at times, but it's clear that this slight change of perspective when we switch between them makes us more flexibly minded.

Looking at it in this way, however deep our contemplation, it can never be the end of the matter. There must be something beyond this state of mind; and by switching our point of view on our contemplative self and reconsidering it rationally, the potential arises for us to break out of that state of mind. Being so deeply absorbed in thought tends towards the obsessional, and it's not easy to shatter that state; in some cases it inevitably drives the person to a precipitate decision and equally rash action. Nevertheless, the fact remains that humans are capable of rational thought, and thinking is never a retreat from acting.

If the amalgam of logic and emotion resulting from deep thinking is unsusceptible to capricious changes, then does that mean there is no need to revisit the initial thoughts that gave rise to it? Surely any kind of thinking constitutes such a recurring dialectic? The human spirit cannot be free without this pendulum-like dynamism. What is most important is not scepticism, but rather belief; yet we may need a large amount of scepticism to get us to that stage of belief. To this point, with the recent prevalence in the adoption of 'ready-made' thought, the habit of giving one thing your full attention—being fully absorbed in thinking it through—has really fallen out of favour.

It is intriguing that, as I have outlined, the word 'thought' comprises two kinds of thinking. At the same time, I have argued that this dual nature is at the core of thinking deeply about something. Living in the present peaceful Japan we do, at first glance it may seem that deep thought isn't a matter of life or death. But in fact our lives are at stake in even the most mundane things.

Take, for example, the aspiration people have to own their own home. To entertain such a family-centric concept, new to Japan, it goes without saying that you must have the resolve to go up against external forces like the state so as to protect your family unit. Once you start to think deeply about the concept of owning your own home, there is no telling where your 'dangerous thoughts' may lead.

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## On Education

- I -

No word sends me into a greater panic than ‘education’. The first thing I feel when I think of people *educating* other people is fear: somewhere deep within me, education and violence are intimately linked. Such an irrational prejudice on my part doubtless stems from the education I myself received, but following this train of thought just disturbs and confuses me all the more.

To my mind, humans are untrustworthy creatures. When we get down to it, we are nothing more than a lump of clay, utterly malleable to the whims of whatever entity may mould us. If people are taught to eat others, that is what they will do. If they are ordered to kill each other, they will. What this amounts to is that a human isn’t born human: it arrives as a little beast, having inherited only base instinct. If education is what turns that beast into a human, then nothing can be more wonderful—or more terrifying.

The notion of what kind of human to cultivate differs by era and society, but what remains constant is that education is a form of control. A more senior entity undertakes the education of a more junior entity that is to be its successor, in line with the senior entity’s ego, and however much the educator may say they are doing it with ‘love’, this likely amounts to sentimental wishful thinking, at least in comparison with the vast political workings of education as a whole.

Being modelled on, and hence in thrall to, the dominant civilisation and culture of our time is intrinsic to human existence. If we choose to live as part of a group, we have no choice but to inherit that model. But one thing that makes people interesting is that even though we may be educated within the mainstream, our powers of imagination enable us to conceive of other ways of living. And that education cultivates such abilities is perhaps its strength.

The fact that I was raised as an only child may be why I hated school and as a consequence came to suffer sorely all things educational. Yet that same person I am as an adult currently enjoys an ongoing education—one now obtained voluntarily, freely, from innumerable people and books.

While I remain aghast at how education can constrain the boundless potential inherent in humanity, human wisdom does continue to allow for multiplicity in education. The foresight remains that there is not one, but multiple, valid ways of living, and that these stem from

various methods of education, arising in turn from a society that enables them; and it is my dream that this trend will continue.

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- II -

I believe the most important thing in considering early-childhood education is to try to recall one's own infancy; unfortunately, though, our memories of that time are not so vivid. I assume everyone is the same in this regard. One thing I do remember is the fear I had that my mother might die. What with me being an only child, and a mama's boy to boot, my mother only had to be a little late home for me to end up turned to the wall crying my eyes out. I recall repeatedly imagining my life after she was gone, my little heart agonising over how I would be able to go on alone.

I don't know exactly when I found myself thinking I would be able to keep living even without her, but you could say it was my first step on the path to adulthood. What brought about such a change? I don't really know, but it must at least have something to do with what is called 'education'. I went to a mission-school kindergarten, and my strongest memory is of a wall chart of Heaven and Hell. The deeds the dead had done during their lifetime were weighed by angels on a scale, and if the scale tipped towards 'good', you could go to Heaven, but if it tipped towards 'evil', you were sent down to Hell. Somehow the image of the chart remains fresh in my mind. Clearly this was 'education'. Not an especially desirable form of education, I concede, but it is difficult for me to conceive how different a person I might be now if I hadn't been exposed to such a chart.

Apart from the education in the narrow sense of the word that people receive from their parents and teachers, there are many forms of guidance on one's journey from child to adult. Children are educated by their siblings and friends, by picture books and TV shows: indeed, by the world at large. We can go as far as to say that the very environment they are raised in—the era, the society—educates them. Thus it is obvious that our conventional exemplars of education—the kindergarten, the school—are merely one element of education in the wider sense: no matter how ideally this education may be bestowed, it must be put in the wider context of the highly contradictory, chaotic reality of the lives we lead.

This disorderly reality is always in motion. In general terms, we have the intention of educating our children so they can best adapt to the society we live in, but at the same time it

is the children themselves who will act to transform our society in the future. If we merely wished to mould our children in our own image through education, it would be simple enough, but in fact we don't wish to make them exactly like us, do we? No—we actually want to raise our children to surpass us.

There are surely few people who believe our current society is ideal. Given that, it's plausible that raising children who are not simply aligned with present society may produce people who will bring society closer to the ideal than it is now. This may be the most difficult aspect of the act of educating. The educative body will not be allowed to stand still. Particularly from an ecological viewpoint, the need for a reassessment of the state of human civilisation on Earth is a pressing matter, meaning that in the debate around the future of the world's educators, the future lives of our children are at stake.

I don't know to what extent education in early childhood can influence an individual. Barring the appearance of some radical new scientific approach, I shall continue to believe that the power of the wider 'education' provided by society and the era themselves outweighs that of the narrower kind, but such a stance means that before we know it we have all assumed the position of educators of our children. Above all, it is this realisation that frightens me.

I can't identify what gave me the strength to overcome the fear of my mother's death, but assuming that I achieved it on my own would be arrogant indeed. While no conscious awareness or memories remain that attest to this, it is clear to me that I was educated not by any specific person, but rather by humanity at large.

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### **A Premise for Living**

Some people maintain that they don't care if humanity goes extinct. Rather than continuing to ravage the planet, it would be better for us to head on the path to extinction, they assert. Yet such people still would not be able to state categorically that they wished for humanity's complete destruction. What I think such statements amount to is ironically enough an expression of their *love* for humanity—they are aiming in their own way to shatter the conventional wisdom of what it means to be human. A large number of us are becoming aware of the need for a change in the direction of the path that humanity has followed up to now, with its constant appeals for advancement, its constant desire for progress without end.

This shift cannot be a simple U-turn—and it is people’s awareness of this fact that makes our confusion and fear so great. We are living in an era where a statement to the effect that it’s all right if humanity dies out actually gives us a curious sense of reassurance.

However, if someone truly believes that it’s all right for humanity to die out, then surely the individual asserting this should be the first to take their own life. If someone who adopts such an extreme position believes humans should be true to themselves in the way they lead their lives as individuals, then they should also be someone who doesn’t swerve from sacrificing themselves for their belief, takes their own life, and becomes a martyr for the cause of a better future for humanity. Far from an individual’s suicide leading to the extinction of humanity, it is conversely likely to amount to a wordless encouragement to those continuing to live; its meaning lies both in how humans exist as social animals that transcend any given individual, and in how it is through the individual that we pursue the enigmatic concept of what it means to be human.

*Whatever happens, I’ll survive. Even if people call me a coward, I’ll cling to life.*—I don’t believe such a mindset is definitive proof that life has inherent value, but at the same time I know that if I were asked when and for what I would willingly throw my life away, these would not be easy questions for me to answer. I believe that finding a cause to die for throws into sharp relief the meaning of one’s life, but the bed one makes to lie in at the end, as it were, is entirely up to the individual concerned; humanity, in transcending the individual, has as its overall goal the straightforward survival of the species. This blind impulse at the core of life—simply to survive—is something humanity shares with the amoeba, and thus the kind of mass suicides that occasionally happen in nature are ultimately an instinctive behaviour aimed at preserving the species. The fact that humanity strives to keep living no matter what the future may bring is a basic premise that no individual can deny, no matter how much they may curse human life.

The recognition that humanity is destroying the environment—that it is permanently disrupting the ecosystem of the planet it inhabits—has rapidly become mainstream in the last few years. The surface symptoms are reported in the newspapers, with attacks made on many of the specific instances of, for example, private companies neglecting others in the pursuit of profit above all else, and of politicians abrogating their responsibilities with inadequate policy. Each problem has its own set of circumstances on the ground, and just who the perpetrators are and who the victims should of course be investigated, but fundamentally

these problems are intrinsic to the civilisation founded on Western values that currently dominates the majority of the globe. If we view things at the macro level, we have no choice but to acknowledge we are both the perpetrators and the victims of our actions.

For some people, the origins of this situation can be traced back to our distant ancestors obtaining fire, or back to when we began to perceive the world through an as-yet undifferentiated proto-language; and on this basis they rashly try to negate human civilisation as a whole. But such an approach to solving the problem would take humanity back to the mammals we were before we began to stand upright, thereby repudiating everything that makes us human.

We first should find the courage to confront the uneasy fact that currently the only thing capable of controlling technology is more-advanced technology. It is inconceivable that we have somehow achieved an awareness of our humanity without the development of technologies such as telecommunications and transport, and similarly it is undeniable that our awareness of the ecological crisis is due to scientific data. Take, for example, the world's oceans. They do not belong to any one country, and naturally therefore the problem of marine pollution cannot be solved without the cooperation of all countries. Ecosystems are not confined to one region but intertwine all around the globe. In the past we have imagined that we earthlings might eliminate war between nations and band together in the face of an attack on Earth by creatures from another planet. Today, such a revolution in human consciousness at a planetary scale is actually required, but without such a farfetched premise—and without humanity possessing the requisite solidarity among its factions.

At the same time as a recent epidemic of deformities caused by certain pharmaceuticals, there are still peoples who remain without access to any medical treatments and suffer high mortality rates as a result. At the same time as foodstuffs are being left to spoil and then thrown away, there is chronic hunger in the world. No sooner does civilisation achieve something positive for its people than it threatens to foist a new calamity upon them.

Those of us living in the civilised world in the twentieth century are in a position where we must build up a group consciousness spanning the hearts of individuals and their everyday lives—a group consciousness that is the sum of our innumerable individual decisions, no matter how small each may be, that will contribute to shaping our future. The more humanity comes together as a single entity, the closer it gets to a shared fate, the larger and more profound becomes each individual's responsibility. Until just a few hundred years ago, it was

sufficient for an individual to think about their place within their family in a given village community, and no further; but in the blink of an eye, that broadened to considering oneself the citizen of a nation, and now, whether we like it or not, we have to think of ourselves as members of humanity at large. Not that this is at all easy for the individual, what with the disconcertingly abstract nature of the call to action.

My line of work is writing poetry and the like. I have the theoretical freedom, as a writer of such creative works, to perform any kind of antisocial or misanthropic act, even to the point of madness or death. As a member of regular human society, and acting on the premise that exercising certain of them may entail a corresponding punishment, I recognise that I have such freedoms. At the same time, though, I am the father of two young children, and as a Japanese citizen have the right to participate in the political process. I have the natural human urge to pass down a better society to my heirs, and as far as possible, I want to achieve this without sacrificing others in the process. The path forward for us is obscure, and it all seems overwhelmingly circuitous, but it is self-evident that we as individuals all have our part to play in moving this vast mass of humanity in the right direction.

While for the oppressed the path to freedom lies in the liberation of their desires, for people like me who to date have lived a fortunate life, the path to freedom—at least from this point on—probably lies only in restraining our desires. The latter must not of course be some sort an evasion from the necessary path, but a paradox of our present age is that it is possible for it to appear to be an evasion, but for people to still maintain within themselves a bustling sense of purpose.

My principal method involves the Japanese language, and as a poet and citizen, I use this language to entreat that I will continue to be able to live as a human individual. New directions of thought based on the tools of science and politics may be called for alongside a potential revival in some forms of religious perspective. Through innovation in language, poetry must once again reveal to people the location of the sacred. I must make the sacrifice this requires of me.

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