

Words as “Fibers of the Mind”:
“Re-narrative” of the Earthquake Disaster through Philosophical Dialogue

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Abstract: *In the aftermath of the unprecedented damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake that struck on March 11, 2011, the Japanese author Yo Henmi wrote that the nation felt a sense of loneliness, for which words could not express the extent of the damage caused by the disaster, and an emptiness that could only be expressed in numbers. Henmi believes that this “lack of words” is the most “serious and grave” crisis Japan has faced since the earthquake.*

Similarly, philosopher Kiyokazu Washida, who has touched on the “crises and hurt” that have emerged in various forms since the Great East Japan Earthquake, argues that “severe emotional turmoil, such as the experience of loss due to an earthquake disaster, first and foremost demands a re-narration of one’s life in one’s own words” because “emotions are woven with words, and without words, all emotions would be indefinite and indistinguishable”. Therefore, it is essential to acquire and find the words that are, as Washida put it, “the fibers of the mind”. In this sense, crisis management in the aftermath of the earthquake will depend on whether or not we can acquire the words that make sense for the person in question to talk about the disaster. If we position post-disaster crisis management in this way, there may be something that philosophy, which examines the possibilities and problems of words through dialogue, can do as well. Furthermore, what can heal such crises and hurt is the attempt at “philosophical practice” that has been developed since the 1980s as a new paradigm in philosophy.

In this paper, we discuss the philosophy café events involving survivors who experienced hurt in disaster-stricken areas and the theoretical background of “philosophical care”, which was expected to differ from so-called “therapy activities”. In this work, we can glimpse the possibility of a kind of philosophical care that is possible only through an “ecological relationship” forged by the engagement of participants in philosophical dialogue.

1. “Words Are the Fibers That Weave Our Mind” —Possibilities for Philosophical Practice in Disaster-affected Areas

“I am in a stupor”, the Japanese author Yo Henmi, who is from the disaster-struck town of Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture, said on an NHK television show, as he tried to come to terms with the unprecedented damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.¹ Given the enormity of the earthquake disaster, “we can do nothing but be in a stupor”, he said. “Nothing else exists but the loneliness of everyone’s lack of words to express the dimension of destruction and its dynamism, the loneliness and futility of having no other means than expressing it through numbers”.²

Henmi noted “the lack of any words” to describe the earthquake disaster, regarding a “vacuum state of words” as the “gravest crisis” Japan has faced since the earthquake itself. This is because such a lack of words leaves us unable to reinterpret the earthquake as an incident that happened to us, making us unable to understand “what kind of crisis we are currently in, the depth of the crisis, and where we are in the historical continuity”.³ Moreover, we lose sight of “the state of the relationship between the incident and ourselves” or even “where we stand”.⁴ This is a perilous situation, and the lack of words continuously exposes us to this danger. Accordingly, Henmi believes that there is only one way to overcome this constant state of *crisis* that Japan has been in since the earthquake: by finding the right words to describe the earthquake. He continues, “What the victims are eagerly waiting for—be it water,

¹ The 2011 Tohoku Earthquake (also called the Great East Japan Earthquake) struck at 14:46 on 11 March 2011 off the Sanriku coast had a moment magnitude of 9.0 at a depth of 24 km and registered as a 7 on the Japan Meteorological Agency seismic intensity scale in northern Miyagi Prefecture. According to a report by the Metropolitan Police Emergency Disaster Security Headquarters, as of 10 July 2013, known casualties included 15,883 deaths and 2667 missing persons, while property damage included 126,467 buildings totally destroyed, 272,244 buildings partially destroyed, 4200 cases of road damage, and 116 cases of bridge damage. Explosions and venting at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant resulted in the unprecedented scattering of radioactive material, particularly along the coastlines and rivers of the Tohoku and Kanto regions, and it continues to have profound effects on agriculture, livestock, and fisheries in these areas.

² Excerpts from Yo Hemmi, an author from Ishinomaki, in the documentary 「こころの時代 瓦礫の中から言葉を作家・辺見庸」[Kokoro no Jidai. Gareki no nakakara kotobawo, Yo Henmi] broadcast by NHK on April 24, 2011.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

food, or heating—it feels as if, at the same time, they are longing for words that reach deep inside. These are by no means clichéd slogans such as *hang in there*, *reconstruction*, or *solidarity*. All we can do as people who have lost loved ones is deeply contemplate this incident, imagine, and then put it into words”.⁵ Citing Gabriel Marcel, the Japanese philosopher Kiyokazu Washida says, “If we did not have words, we would not be able to understand our feelings because we would be unable to distinguish between happiness, sadness, and embarrassment”. He argues that to calm the grave emotional swings caused by experiences of loss, such as the loss of loved ones in the earthquake, we first need “to re-narrate our life stories” using “our own words”.⁶ Washida continues, “Emotions are woven with words, and without words, all emotions would be amorphous and indistinguishable. We begin to recognize how we feel by learning words. For narratives to be more detailed and accurate, we need to use appropriate words in appropriate situations more delicately. We must find and obtain words because they are the fibers that weave our mind”.⁷

In that respect, we can say that crisis management after the earthquake depends on whether or not we can acquire the *words* to discuss the earthquake. More candidly, it is not too much to say that crisis management is the management of *words*. And, if that is indeed the case, then philosophy may be able to play a role here because it uses dialogues to facilitate profound discussions about the possibilities of and issues associated with *words*. The utility of the act of philosophy, namely “philosophical practice”, is presently being tested by the earthquake.⁸

This paper discusses an attempt to engage in philosophical practice through dialogue at philosophy cafés in disaster-affected Sendai. It also touches on the current trend in philosophical practice developed since the 1980s as a new paradigm in philosophy by Western philosophers such as Gerd Achenbach, Peter B. Raabe, and Ran Lahav. According to the American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, in the current paradigm, philosophy is being reinterpreted as something to be practiced not as a “detached intellectual technique dedicated to displaying cleverness” but as an

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Washida 2012, pp. 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.86.

⁸ The following paper also discusses the possibility of philosophical practice in disaster-affected areas after the earthquake. Takahiro Nishimura “Is the Earthquake Disaster Trying Philosophy? : An Attempt of ‘Philosophical practice’ in the Disaster-struck Areas”. *The Formosan Journal of Medical Humanities* 15 16, 2015, pp. 37–52.

immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery” and “as a way of addressing the most painful problems of human life”.⁹

We have experienced numerous separations and deaths since the earthquake. We have been forced to question anew various values, including our views on life and death, as well as words such as *love*, *conscience*, *kindness*, *loyalty*, and *fairness*, which we had developed comfortably in tranquility. Under such circumstances, the philosophical practice taking place at the philosophical café events where the participants’ *words* (ideas) are strengthened through *dialogue* with others may be needed. Only under such circumstances may it be possible to examine whether philosophical practice can play a major role in crisis management after a disaster. In the next section, I would like to first briefly touch on the ideological background and significance of philosophical practice as well as one form of philosophical dialogue.

2. Philosophical Practice—“Philosophy as a Way of Life”

Comparing the results of practice utilizing philosophy with those of the natural sciences and humanities, some have argued that philosophy is not useful. Instead, it can be said that philosophical practice arose as a new paradigm in the 1980s to refute such a “view”. The discussion of “philosophical practice” here may be the first time many readers will have heard the term, even though it has recently been examined in various areas of research. Many researchers questioned the practical effects of philosophy in the past. However, since the 1980s, the Philosophische Praxis (Philosophical Practice), which is said to have been initiated by the German philosopher Gerd B. Achenbach, has instead developed in defiance of such arguments.

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Philosophical practice is a movement searching for ways in which philosophy can be widely practiced in society, where experts and professionals do not monopolize its practice. The common denominator in the movement is that participants in a philosophical dialogue begin the dialogue with issues they encounter in their daily lives or society. One of the advocates of philosophical practice, is Peter Harteloh, who worked for a long time at the Erasmus Institute for Philosophical Practice and argues

⁹ Nussbaum 2004, pp.485.

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, Leonard Nelson, a philosopher and pedagogue at the Georg August University of Göttinge, proposed “das sokratische Dialogue” as a method of philosophical practice and philosophy education before Achenbach did.

that academic philosophy is philosophy in name only and that philosophical practice is the twentieth century’s movement against it for having become so remote from the issues and topics of daily life. He also considers the practice as “an attempt to redefine philosophy as a way of life”, a view also held by the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot.

Hadot, in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, examines in detail how ancient Hellenistic philosophy and Roman philosophy originally appeared as “a therapeutic passion” intended to bring about “a profound transformation of the individual’s mode of seeing and being, a transformation of our vision of the world and a metamorphosis of our personality”.¹¹ As Peter B. Raabe, the author of *Philosophical Counseling*, points out, “many schools of ancient philosophy viewed philosophy as ‘the art of living’, not as the study of pure and abstract theories or interpretation of original texts”.¹² In other words, ancient philosophy had a clear aim toward practical self-improvement, as Hadot made clear in his study of the history of philosophy.

Surprisingly, many philosophers have attempted to determine what philosophical practice should be based on the features of ancient philosophy. These movements can be said to be “a return to the ancient roots of the practice of philosophy”¹³ or “a new version of ancient traditions”.¹⁴ Philosophical practice that connects philosophy and daily lives can be practiced in a variety of ways, including philosophy cafés, philosophical counseling, and Socratic dialogue. The foundation of these attempts lies in the philosophical educational method known as the “Socratic method”, adopted by the early 20th-century German philosopher Leonard Nelson (1882–1927). In a lecture at the Göttingen Education Association in 1922, Nelson explained that the Socratic method is a pedagogical method based on the art of philosophizing, rather than philosophy itself. It is a method used “not to instruct about philosophers, but to instruct learners to become philosophers”.¹⁵ He emphasized the “regressive Abstraction” method¹⁶ in which contingent facts used for individual judgments are abstracted and the obscure assumptions applied to concrete cases are

¹¹ Hadot 1995, pp. 82.

¹² Raabe 2001, pp. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Lahav 1995a, pp. ix.

¹⁵ Nelson 1949, pp. 1–40.

¹⁶ This “regressive Abstraction” method is similar to induction in the natural science in that it moves from specifics to generalities. However, it differs from induction in that it eliminates accidental things by returning to the knowledge used as assumptions for judgment. For further details of Nelson’s philosophical educational pedagogy, please refer to Terada 2001, pp. 65–66.

clarified. This method involves a regressive examination of results and premises. By incorporating this method in philosophy education, Nelson attempted to spread “philosophical practice to instruct learners to become philosophers”. Incidentally, the method of philosophical dialogue practice that I have been using in the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and the medical treatment field was inspired by Nelson’s regressive Abstraction approach. Through his efforts, philosophical practice has been improved and organized to deepen the philosophical dialogue with a greater number of participants in a shorter time (see below for details).

At present, philosophical practice has developed in various ways to suit different situations and needs, including Philosophy for Children and neo-Socratic dialogue (NSD), in addition to philosophical counseling, Group Philosophical Counseling with multiple participants, and philosophy cafés, and the approach has recently begun to be actively adopted in education and medical settings as well as corporate employee training. However, even among researchers and practitioners of philosophical practice, the direction and goals of the practice are not as straightforward as they would like. Furthermore, this obscurity invites a certain ambiguity, as in philosophical dialogue practices in the respective domains. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the goals of philosophical practice again, not only for the disaster-affected areas discussed in this paper but also for the future systematic injection of philosophical dialogue into areas such as the medical field. How the goals are set will undoubtedly affect the outcomes of introducing philosophical dialogue practice in areas affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

3. The Goals of “Philosophical Practice”? —Reweaving a Disturbed “Worldview”

As already mentioned, Peter Harteloh proposes several characteristics of philosophical practice, specifically, that it involves engaging in philosophical dialogue with people without philosophical training, connecting philosophy with daily life, and pushing the practice beyond the confines of college campuses.¹⁷ However, what should the purpose of philosophical practice be in the first place? Where does this necessity come from? Moreover, what are the results expected in this practice?

¹⁷ This is how Harteloh described the philosophical practice in his lecture “Philosophical Practice as a New Paradigm in Philosophy”, given at Rikkyo University in March 2012.

Gerd Achenbach, the German founder of the modern philosophical counseling movement, disagrees with following goal-oriented procedures, calling it “the first mistake in the practice of philosophy”, and instead argues for “an open-ended procedure consisting of continuous reinterpretations of oneself and the world”. Citing the German-Swiss psychiatrist Karl Jaspers, he emphasizes that “invention of a finite goal is technical and does not constitute philosophical practice”.¹⁸ He concludes that even if philosophical practice has some goal, it can only “maintain a philosophical skepticism concerning everything that considers itself ‘true’”.¹⁹ In other words, there are no expected results or effects.

Similarly, Ran Lahav, a philosopher who has long been engaged in research and practice, including philosophical counseling, at Haifa University in Israel and elsewhere, interprets philosophical practice as nothing less than what assigns a “value to the process of pursuit itself”, not what pursues “a finished product, such as a philosophical theory”, concluding that philosophical practice is a movement that “encourages the unique expression of individuals’ concrete ways of being in this world (in their own words), rather than constructing general and abstract theories”.²⁰

However, philosophical practice is not to be interpreted from only an open-ended perspective. Although researchers (practitioners) of philosophical practice hold various opinions, there is a reluctant yet somewhat shared acceptance of it having some goals and effects. A careful reading of related articles by various researchers and practitioners reveals that what underlies their diverse opinions is the Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion that “philosophy unties the knots in our thinking”.²¹ For example, Karl Pfeifer, Professor Emeritus at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, points out that Wittgenstein saw tight knots in thinking as “pathological symptoms of intellectual disease” and that the various necessary philosophical methods were a “therapy” to untie them.²²

Following Wittgenstein, Steven Segal, known for his hermeneutic approach to management and business ethics, also emphasizes the “reflexive therapeutic activity” of philosophy in his article “Philosophy As a Therapeutic Activity”, arguing that “it is in fact a reflexive therapeutic activity in that it allows the individual to change the way he or she experiences the world by reflexively deconstructing the

¹⁸ Achenbach 1996, pp.13.

¹⁹ Achenbach 1995, pp. 73.

²⁰ Lahav 1996, pp. 260.

²¹ Wittgenstein 1967, #452.

²² Pfeifer 1994, pp. 66.

texts or stories that shape the way he or she relates to the world”.²³ Professor James Tuedio of California State University, who attempted to find ways in which philosophy should be practiced in Gadamer hermeneutics, points out in his article “Postmodern Perspectives in Philosophical Practice” that “effective philosophical facilitation” is connected to whether the participants of philosophical dialogues can learn the practices of “critical examination and reconstruction of dysfunctional conceptual elements underlying their narrative construction of problematized relations and events in their life”.²⁴

As just described, many researchers and practitioners of philosophical practice see its application in Wittgenstein’s idea of *unraveling the knot*. Of course, the “effects” of philosophical practice are not limited to that. Lahav believes that philosophical practice, including philosophical counseling, assumes a central role such as “worldview interpretation”. According to Lahav, “a worldview is one out of several ways of organizing, analyzing, categorizing, noting patterns, drawing implications, making sense, and more generally assigning meanings to one’s life events”. The philosophical practitioner as “an expert in worldview interpretation”²⁵ is said to offer the participants in philosophy dialogue sessions “a system of coordinates by helping them to uncover various meaning that are expressed in their way of life, and critically examine those problematic aspects that express their predicaments—such as meaning crisis, feeling of boredom and emptiness, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, anxiety, etc”. They do so in order to reweave their worldview that has been torn apart, for example, by a disaster such the Great East Japan Earthquake. It can be restated using Dutch philosophical practitioner Bauke Zijlstra’s words that this attempt at philosophical practice is the “disturbed equilibrium” of those in suffering—that is, to recover both the equilibrium in disturbed life and the equilibrium in disturbed thoughts on their lives”.²⁶

Many things are tested in the affected areas following the earthquake, including views on life and death. Therefore, it is necessary to connect philosophy to daily life in order to restore, as Zijlstra says, “the equilibrium in disturbed lives”. In particular, according to the South African philosophical practitioner Barbara Norman, it is necessary to offer a place where the participants in philosophical dialogue can “vocalize” their interpretations of the difficult conditions they are experiencing and

²³ Segal 1998, pp. 36–47. The following texts were consulted for this discussion. Raabe, Peter B., *Philosophical Counseling. Theory and Practice*, Praeger Publishers, 2001, 30.

²⁴ Tuedio 1996, pp. 183.

²⁵ Lahav 1995b, pp. 9–15.

²⁶ Zijlstra 1996, pp. 35.

to support the acquisition of new words through the participants’ mutual critical evaluations. Such words can be established when the participants listen to others with empathy and ask questions with a simple understanding of the immediate suffering at hand. Norman, incidentally, refers to the relationship among philosophical dialogue participants as “the art of ecological relationship and interpretation”. By this, she means “open-minded questioning and a constant reinterpretation of the (social and other) environment”.²⁷

As described above, it can be seen that a loose goal exists for philosophical practice. This inevitably leads to the philosophical examination of words as “fibers of the mind”. The survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake, who have witnessed unprecedented damage and are experiencing a breakdown in their sense of values, are the ones who might benefit most from engaging in philosophical practice to reweave this broken equilibrium, in particular, a place to engage in philosophical dialogue (e.g., at a philosophy café) where they can thoroughly re-examine the state of their own individual words as the fibers of their mind through dialogue with others.

4. Re-narrative of the Earthquake—Constructing a Venue for Philosophical Dialogue

Philosophy café is a practice that aims to facilitate frank and philosophical dialogue between participants by removing hierarchical relationships such as those between teacher and student or boss and subordinate. A theme is given at each meeting (e.g., whether or not our bodies are really ours), and primordial questions are asked about it. Although the purpose is to facilitate philosophical dialogue, participants do not need to be well-versed in philosophy, however, to avoid mindless chitchat, a facilitator encourages participants to speak as well as to listen to each other. This is what makes the activity meaningful. The dialogue does not presuppose dichotomous or factious positions such as agreement and disagreement. Instead, the aim is to strengthen each participant’s ideas through dialogue with others. In this sense, a philosophy café is a “neutral arena for the development of open thinking”.²⁸

The philosophy café is thought to have been created by Marc Sautet, then a philosophy professor at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, at Café des Phares in the Place de la Bastille in the 1990s. Similar to philosophical counseling,

²⁷ Norman 1995, pp. 56.

²⁸ Gerbers 1995, pp. 158.

philosophy café can be said to be a form of philosophical practice. For example, the Gerd Achenbach opened a “philosophical clinic” near Cologne in 1981, which is said to be the forerunner of Sautet’s philosophy café. Since then, Achenbach’s approach has gradually been adopted by others, and in 1982, Gesellschaft für Philosophische Praxis was established. After 1997, the organization was reorganized as Internationale Gesellschaft für Philosophische Praxis,²⁹ and its activities have since spread to other parts of the world, including the Netherlands, France, Israel, the United States, Norway, and South Africa.

Philosophy café facilitates dialogue by removing the hierarchical relationships among participants. However, it does not necessarily dissolve the participant’s social attributes. This is because “dialogues, in the first place, are nothing but narrations by individuals based on their own actual feelings, experiences, beliefs, and values. They are not objective discussions in the search for solutions without personal opinions”.³⁰ In other words, according to the Japanese philosopher Yoshimichi Nakajima, “dialogues are different from arguments, which are based on a language usage apart from our own reality”.³¹ He continues by saying that those who engage in dialogues do not do so with an objective attitude that is independent of their own situation; at the same time, they do not necessarily engage in dialogues with a subjective attitude completely bounded by their own situations. “Rather”, he notes, “dialogues occur in between. Dialogue participants begin to talk in search of the objective truth that maintains their own situations, experiences, and feelings”.³²

Based on the above ideas, in June 2011, three months after the Great East Japan Earthquake, we began a philosophical practice to reweave the worldview of the disaster victims through careful dialogue with others in the disaster-stricken areas. Through philosophical dialogue with others, we have observed many survivors gradually reweave the “fibers of their mind” by retracing and recounting in their own words the event of the disaster that unfolded before their eyes.

The leading members of the philosophy café events in Sendai³³ included Sendai City officials, nurses who have been volunteering in Ishinomaki since just

²⁹ See the Internationale Gesellschaft für Philosophische Praxis (IGPP) website: <http://www.igpp.org/>

³⁰ Nakajima 1997, pp. 102.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 135.

³³ Since the earthquake, it has been run as the “Thinking Table, The Philosophy Café” by the Sendai City Board of Education with the cooperation of Sendai Mediatheque (<https://www.smt.jp/>).

after the earthquake, high school teachers in Fukushima whose schools became designated emergency shelters, and college students who had stayed in shelters after their houses were swept away by the tsunami. Instead of lingering on their status as “earthquake victims” living in an inconvenient situation without a purpose, the participants seemed to engage in dialogues with others in attempts to “recapture the incident of the earthquake” and “express it in their own words”.³⁴ Many earthquake survivors who participated in the philosophy café events may have felt the same way. In other words, they might have intuitively believed that they would have to “distance” themselves from the incident (the earthquake) in order to see things that cannot be or are difficult to see from the perspective of those involved (the survivors).

Now, the patience of philosophical thought to search for the roots of the incident is needed, rather than skillfully interpreting the incident using precise philosophical terminology and concepts. According to Kiyokazu Washida, “many people in the earthquake-affected areas are now confronted by the need for re-narratives. They need to reconsider who they are and accept unreasonable and unfathomable realities as undeniable facts; they must *re-narrate* the stories they have weaved in a different form, something we frequently need to do in life. This requires memories to be retold. In this sense, transitioning from the present self to the new one is an undeniably risky task”. Washida sees this as those who have lost their parents, children, houses, or jobs being pushed back, without a choice, to the starting point of their dialogue.³⁵

The survivors, who have experienced the deaths and partings of many people since the Great East Japan Earthquake and have been forced to reexamine many of their own values, including their views of life and death, needed a place to engage in philosophical dialogue where they could strengthen their ideas through dialogue with others, carefully guided by a facilitator. To this end, philosophy café events were organized by the Sendai City Board of Education in cooperation with Sendai Mediatheque. The events are officially known as Thinking Table, The Philosophy Café. Through dialogue with the participants about complex earthquake-related tasks, themes were set for each session, and the participants engaged in philosophical dialogue with one another. This form of philosophical dialogue has become a long-

³⁴ Excerpts from Yo Henmi, an author from Ishinomaki, in the documentary 「こころの時代 瓦礫の中から言葉を作家・辺見庸」[Kokoro no Jidai. Gareki no nakakara kotobawo, Yo Henmi] broadcast by NHK on April 24, 2011.

³⁵ Washida 2011.

lasting activity in the affected areas, with more than 70 events taking place since the first one was held in 2011. What has been discussed most is the feeling of *guilt* that the people of Tohoku have been carrying, regardless of whether they are victims of the earthquake. Through these philosophy café events, it was revealed that many of the survivors have a profound feeling of *guilt* that they could not save their family, that they survived, and that others suffered a lot worse than they did. This could be due to the fact that most of the damage was caused by the tsunami.

There is a clear difference between those who suffered significant damage and those who did not, and the survivors feel *guilty* about this. Some even hold the extreme belief that everybody should have suffered equally. Where does this feeling of *guilt* come from? Is it something that survivors really have to feel? Not surprisingly, there are no clear answers to these questions. There is no other way to think about it oneself but to restate stories (*re-narrate*) through dialogue with others. We should not rephrase this guilt using technical terms such as “survivor’s guilt” and pretend to comprehend it. There are no clear answers to the various problems in the affected areas, including but not limited to these issues of *guilt* or *moral debt*. That is why the philosophy café has served a meaningful function in providing a venue where people can engage in dialogue with others through their own words as well as question and reexamine (strengthen) the state of their frayed mind after the disaster.

5. The Possibilities of Philosophical Care—Mending Frayed “Fibers of the Mind” Differently than Therapy

When the first philosophy café event was held with the earthquake as the theme, some of the survivors protested, arguing that philosophy is useless considering the unprecedented level of damage caused by the earthquake. They pointed out that philosophy could not bring back the victims swept away by the tsunami nor could it help those who had lost their homes. Therefore, they saw such activity as meaningless. However, once the events began, many survivors participated. Each session involved 80 participants, and numerous dialogues were conducted. Indeed, philosophy may not be able to provide direct assistance in the aftermath of a disaster, and in that sense, philosophy may not be applicable in dealing with people’s ongoing misfortunes. However, I feel that philosophy provides its own form of assistance and support. Only after such points are considered will the significance of philosophical practice become evident in the earthquake-affected areas. At any rate, even though it may not provide

direct and immediate support, why have so many participants (survivors) gathered to practice philosophy in the affected areas, and why do they continue to do so even now?

What did they expect from this form of philosophical practice (philosophical dialogue)? This is my own impression based on my experiences there since the Great East Japan Earthquake, but their expectations seem to be based on the possibility of philosophical care,³⁶ which differs from the psychotherapy that many philosophy practitioners have been discussing since the 1990s. In other words, the possibility of a non-therapeutic approach to mending the frayed minds of the survivors (participants) was anticipated through dialogue with others, carefully excavating their own words as “fibers of the mind” and philosophically examining the meaning of those words.

This non-therapeutic approach through philosophical practice opens up the possibility of philosophical care, in which each person’s thinking, which the disaster had broken down, is strengthened together. Shlomit C. Schuster, a philosophy practitioner in Israel, mentions the possibility of this non-therapeutic philosophical care in several papers on philosophical practice and attempts to extract its specificity by positioning philosophical dialogue, include philosophical counseling, as “the antipode of therapy”.³⁷ She calls her non-therapeutic approach to psychiatry “trance therapy” and emphasizes its uniqueness as something that is “not therapy yet can nevertheless induce health and well-being”.³⁸ In other words, although this is discussed mainly in dialogue sessions such as philosophy counseling and multi-person philosophical dialogues in the mental health field, she actively acknowledges that there can be some “effect” in the practice of philosophical dialogue.³⁹ Of course, it is necessary to carefully discuss the differences among philosophical counseling conducted by a philosophical counselor for an individual, group philosophical counseling conducted for a small group of people, and Socratic dialogue or philosophy café events, where a philosophy practitioner serves as a facilitator for larger groups of people. However, because this paper is intended to roughly ascertain the possible effects (philosophical care) of philosophical dialogue that might be obtained on a dimension other than that expected from therapy as conducted in the

³⁶ Shuster 1993, pp. 587.

³⁷ Shuster 1995, pp. 102. Raabe 2001, pp. 29.

³⁸ Shuster 1996a, pp. 248.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

psychiatric and psychotherapy fields, we will leave the in-depth research for another time.

Needless to say, it is the participants (survivors) who have come together in anticipation of some philosophical practice (philosophical dialogue) in the disaster area, not “patients” seeking “therapy” or “a cure” for their so-called mental problems. Indeed, many of the participants in the philosophy cafés we have held in the disaster-affected areas have experienced hardship as a result of the disaster, and their own worldview has been torn apart, leaving them in a state of disturbed equilibrium, that is, a disequilibrium between their disordered lives and disordered thinking about life. However, whether it is a philosophical counseling session between individuals or a group session such as a philosophy café involving multiple participants, we should not forget that philosophical dialogue is premised on the participation of “an equally philosophizing person”⁴⁰ or collaboration among people who have the will and potential to become “a partner to dialogue”⁴¹ with the intention of somehow “recovering the disturbed state of equilibrium” through tenacious dialogue with others. In this sense, it is impossible from the outset to argue that the effects of philosophical dialogue can be viewed only in the context of therapy.

In general, the word “therapy” is used in the psychological field to mean a specialized intervention aimed at dealing with what might be classified as an illness or disease or a psychological disorder diagnosed based on the specialized knowledge and skills of the therapist. Nevertheless, given that both psychotherapy and philosophical dialogue are concerned with issues of the mind, comparisons between the two in the context of recovery, treatment, and therapy are, in a sense, unavoidable. In fact, since the 1990s, researchers and practitioners of philosophical practice have discussed the differences between psychotherapy and philosophical dialogue practice (philosophical counseling) in the context of non-therapeutic approaches. Some have attempted to answer questions about the significance of the existence and the need for philosophical dialogic practices in the field of psychiatry by identifying a more “philosophical basis” in psychotherapeutic approaches.⁴² In contrast, others have attempted to differentiate between philosophical dialogic practices such as philosophical counseling and clinical psychology/psychiatry, from a

⁴⁰ Ruchmann 1998, pp. 25.

⁴¹ Lahav 1995a, pp. xv.

⁴² The German philosopher Peter Kestenbaum, who actively tried to introduce a new approach called “clinical philosophy” into psychiatry, is one example. He pointed out the importance of philosophical dialogue in psychiatry in his book *The New Image of the Person: The Theory and Practice of Clinical Philosophy* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1978).

psychotherapeutic perspective. In particular, the latter group views psychoanalytic therapy as taking a reductionist stance (reductive interpretation) in which the therapist deciphers the ‘real’ (unconscious), which is hidden from the patient underneath the (conscious) phenomenon of what the patient tells the therapist, and then diagnoses and treats the client based on the results of this process. The psychoanalytic (psychotherapeutic) understanding of people acknowledges a philosophical worldview, but it always has a psychological substratum (unconscious and unintentional) at its foundation, and it is in this psychological substratum that people are identified and grasped.⁴³ Accordingly, this psychotherapeutic perspective tends to “thoroughly strip [the individual’s] problems of their ‘social, political, economic, historical, and philosophical context and roots’”.⁴⁴ That is why the theorists and practitioners of the philosophical practice, to determine the possibility of some effect or philosophical care in the context of philosophical dialogue sessions, must first distance themselves from the psychoanalytic perspective that presupposes the above “therapy”, or to use their own expression, they must “de-analyze” and “de-diagnose” (to move away from psychoanalytic problem analysis).⁴⁵ Incidentally, the idea that “life has significant philosophical aspects that cannot be reduced to psychological mechanisms and processes”⁴⁶ became the core thesis of the philosophical dialogue session at that time.

The psychotherapeutic perspective places the patient’s problems in a therapeutic context and thus induces the patient to become dependent on the therapist’s professional intervention and persuasion. In this dependency on the specialized interventions of a therapist, the person concerned is inevitably reduced to a passive existence and “loses considerable autonomy with respect to the reconstruction of their life narrative”.⁴⁷ In contrast, the dialogue sessions in philosophy practice are designed to break free from this dependence on the therapist and to proactively view the participants as autonomous entities, that is, as the “dialogue partners” and “equally philosophizing persons” mentioned earlier. In addition to this, the aim of philosophical practice is to avoid the temptation to forcefully re-colorize the concerns of those involved based on specialized terminology and to remain faithful to the process of carefully pursuing and examining the words as “fibers of the mind” in those who have problems (questions) in their

⁴³ Raabe 2001, pp. 104.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 82.

⁴⁵ Schuster 1996b, pp. 24.

⁴⁶ Lahav 1995a, pp. xv.

⁴⁷ Tuedio 1996, pp. 183.

daily lives. Therefore, the relationship in philosophy counseling and other forms of philosophy dialogue sessions differs from the rigid hierarchical relationship between the medical provider (counselor) and patient (client) and is a very receptive and open interactional relationship supported by the so-called *manner of equality*. In the words of Barbara Norman, introduced in Section 4 of this paper, this relationship can be viewed as an “ecological relationship” formed by the participants in the dialogue sessions, including the person concerned with the problems (questions). This is because the ecological relationship between the client and the philosophy counselor (or between the participants, including the facilitator in a group philosophical dialogue session) is “caring rather than confrontational and consists of persons who are interdependent participants defined by open-minded questioning, with empathy functioning between them”.⁴⁸ In this light, the possibility of philosophical care in the practice of philosophical dialogue is deeply related to the ecological relationship supported by this mutual “empathic attitude”, in which one feels that others accept one’s ideas through philosophical dialogue.

The goal of philosophical dialogue practice is to carefully rethink the meaning and usage of words that come to mind during philosophical dialogue with others and to critically examine the latent values and ideas (assumptions) behind such words that one may not have been aware of. Another goal is exploring the philosophical meanings of various everyday attitudes and thinking about the self and reality, as well as *assisting* and *caring for* each other in repairing the gaps in the “worldview interpretation” of those who have been placed in difficult situations due to disasters, and gradually recovering from the disturbed equilibrium through the maintenance of their own words and thoughts. This approach to the possibility of philosophical care that differs from therapy can be described as “an alternative to psychotherapy, different from alternative psychotherapy”, as the Italian philosophical practitioner Augusto Cavadi put it.⁴⁹ The philosophical dialogue that has been practiced since the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 must have been expected to touch upon the philosophical care that derives from the ecological relationship among the participants.

6. The Flow and Manners of Philosophical Dialogue—The Ecological Relationship of Dialogue Enabling Philosophical Care

⁴⁸ Norman 1995, pp. 52–53.

⁴⁹ Cavadi 2010, pp. 166–167.

It remains unclear how the “ecological relationship” in philosophical dialogue is prepared and through what process it enables philosophical care. Barbara Norman, who stressed the importance of the ecological relationship in philosophy counseling and other forms of dialogue sessions, stated that philosophical dialogue “aims to take the participants from a comparatively naïve understanding of the current predicament under discussion, through a form of empathic listening, questioning, and critical self and group appraisal, to the constitution of new vocabulary” and that “this interaction provides the opportunity for talking about feeling, beliefs, attitudes and desires in a way that is both reflective and constructive”.⁵⁰

Finally, I would like to close this paper with a brief description of how my colleagues and I have constructed a venue for philosophical dialogue sessions based on Norman’s idea of ecological relations, especially the flow and manner of such sessions. Perhaps in the course of participating in such sessions, by carefully examining the condition of one’s own words as the “fibers of the mind” through dialogue with others, one might be able to read some of the mechanisms that make possible philosophical care for those experiencing disturbed equilibrium.

(1) Set up a venue for dialogue

Philosophical dialogue aims to examine philosophical issues and one’s own values through dialogue with others, something that the participants may not have been aware of. For this reason, it is necessary to develop and deepen one’s thinking correctly in a shorter time together with the other participants, which is why we deliberately appoint facilitators from the field of philosophy and ethics. Of course, in doing so, the facilitator does not impart any philosophical knowledge to the participant, nor do they construct the discussion on their own behalf. However, the facilitator always helps the participants to follow the thinking process and to deepen their thinking without getting unnecessarily bogged down. Even if the same words and expressions are used, they may mean different things to different participants. Therefore, the facilitators, who moderate the dialogue, need to be patient and willing to carefully adjust the meaning of the words used each time to ensure that the participants continue to engage in the dialogue with each other.

(2) Set themes for dialogue that are rooted in life

⁵⁰ Norman 1995, pp. 56.

Philosophical dialogue requires a process of setting (sharing) personal concerns, perplexities, or vague problems about values felt in daily life as clear themes that other participants and parties can access and think about together so that they can immediately focus their thinking on issues related to personal worldviews and values. Themes can either be decided during the actual philosophical dialogue or prepared in advance. However, the theme should be based on the actual problems and concerns of the participants in their daily lives.

(3) Ensure an equal and safe venue for dialogue

In the introductory part of the philosophical dialogue, participants are given plenty of time to speak freely and share their thoughts and experiences related to the theme. Unfortunately, much of the communication in our daily lives is based on power relations. Therefore, it is necessary to create a space where all participants can engage in dialogue by removing hierarchical relationships and creating flat interpersonal relationships (where everyone gathered there can think and talk on an equal footing) and where dialogue can proceed in an atmosphere of equality. In addition, each participant must feel comfortable expressing his or her ideas and values and that their ideas, whatever they may be, have been heard (intellectual safety). This feeling is also essential in preparing for the possibility of philosophical care.

(4) Speak—Listen—Critique (krinein)

Once the participants have a shared awareness of the need to create an equal and safe space under the facilitator's guidance, a dialogue based on the set theme is initiated. Each participant is instructed to listen to and sense to the extent possible the thoughts and language of the other participants as well as their hesitations, and at the same time to address their own thoughts carefully to a specific destination. The participants are encouraged to put together (reflectively reconsider) their own self-centered thoughts and ideas, which have been formed only within their own minds, into a single considered opinion, and then to carefully voice (verbalize) it to a specific destination (i.e., to other participants) in a way that is easy to understand while showing the logical paths and bases of their opinions.

In so doing, it is imperative to listen to the words (voices) of the other participants with good-natured interest and perseverance. It is no exaggeration to say that this listening attitude is essential to dialogue. In talking and listening, participants

should not uncritically agree with the opinions and ideas of others but rather try to identify the subtle differences in ideas and values that emerge between themselves and others through dialogue. It is essential to listen to the voices (words) of others with persistence, and in some cases, while questioning the logical contradictions and reasoning, to carefully identify and sort out the similarities and differences between one’s own ideas and those of other participants and further examine these differences critically. Above all, the fact that the word “critique” comes from the Greek word “krinein”, which means to divide, seems to be something that should be well shared in the conduct of dialogue.

(5) Share keywords of thinking

When the free dialogue reaches a certain degree of maturity, we move on to the work of deepening philosophical thought by gradually raising the level of abstraction. It is impossible to deepen the dialogue by talking endlessly about each person’s specific concerns and problem consciousness. The more critical the issue is to the individual, the more difficult it is for them to go back to the root of the issue and reexamine it. What we most want to avoid is getting stuck in a problematic situation like an endless loop, agonizing alone, unable to determine where to start asking questions about our problems and awareness of the issues. Therefore, as the next step in the philosophical dialogue, it is necessary to dissociate one’s problems and concerns from oneself and develop an objective perspective from which to shift dialogue into a new phase in which one can follow a solid thought process.

In the philosophy café events my colleagues and I have held in the affected areas, they have found this vital phase in the “sharing keywords” process. This keyword-sharing stage is when the dialogue deepens dramatically. Among the words that at first glance seem to have been spoken freely and casually on the theme, there are keywords and ways of thinking that are indispensable for deepening philosophical thought regarding the essential issues to be addressed. The participants carefully reexamine the words and thoughts they expressed in the first half of the dialogue and share them as a solid starting point for further deepening their thinking in the future. They then delve further into their thinking, based on the keywords (clues), which were touched upon during the dialogue.

(6) Examine (savor) keywords

In the next step, the shared keywords are thoroughly examined one by one through dialogue between the participants, who pay close attention to the previously mentioned manner of speaking, listening and critiquing in order to clarify the meaning, content, and usage of words as well as to organize and categorize them. Here, in particular, it is necessary to shelve all assumptions, question everything from a fundamental blind spot, and make the most of the original characteristics of philosophy, which seeks to examine and savor. In philosophy, intensity and depth of thinking are measured by how one can distance oneself from the events in front of one's eyes as well as one's worldview and values in order to *savor* them anew.

(7) Establish a reference axis of thought

In the final stage of the philosophical dialogue, the participants formulate a tentative definition of the theme based on the wording (keywords) and thoughts examined in the dialogue thus far. For example, if the theme of the philosophical dialogue is “the peculiar guilt felt by disaster survivors”, the participants will work out a definition (or, in some cases, a new question) on the whiteboard regarding this guilt. Of course, the participants never reach a final consensus. Instead, they arrive at what can be called a “reference axis” of thought that enables each participant, even after leaving the space of philosophical dialogue in which they think together with other participants, to confirm the state of transition of the thought processes and values that they have developed in dialogue with others and to continue to examine them firmly, although this time alone, with that definition as a firm point of reference. Of course, there are times when there is a significant gap between the final definition and one's thinking. It is also possible that they will differ substantially from the values the participant initially held. However, this range of values is a measure that can reveal how one's values have been deconstructed through philosophical dialogue with others, and from this, a new opportunity for questions is created, allowing for a further examination of one's values. Only through such careful cultivation of an ecological relationship will it be possible to provide philosophical care for the minds of survivors so greatly affected by the disaster.

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