



Aspects of Virtue



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Human societies are in a state of constant change and therefore they are < living societies >, where the ethical and behavioral standards, the virtues to be praised, the duties or norms are rapidly changing and never ever remain unaltered. The virtues we praise and the emphasis we lay on moral values also quickly change in accordance with the constantly changing social conditions. This paper examines these < virtues > from the viewpoint of < dynamic ethics >.

1. TRUST AND NON-TRUST

CHANGING VIRTUES

Since early times, Plato, Aristotle, for example, and then Christianity and for that matter Confucianism have systematically taken up a number of virtues as an ideal of human action, of character traits, or of mental attitude. The following are the major virtues of this kind: trust and affection, sincerity, honesty, gentleness, humbleness, generosity, abstinence, diligence, or love, piety, hope, and justice, order, discipline, sagacity, wisdom, prudence, golden mean, and also excellence, dignity, patience, courage. They are indeed the virtues necessary for us to govern human relationships, to properly respond to the changing situations, and to achieve our goals.

The meaning of the word “virtue” differs somewhat in the East and in the West. It is nevertheless possible to try to find a common denominator: virtue can be defined as our inherent nature evolved by our experience, or as the excellent abilities as part of our personalities. In other words, what is called virtue are our excellent abilities and characteristics that are necessary for a better life. The argument about virtues therefore intends to judge human actions as right or wrong, and discuss their merits and demerits based on a subjective view, examining the abilities and the mental state of a human as an agent.

As a matter of course, the virtues necessary for each and every one of us cannot be irrelevant for our human relations and communities. All the abilities, character traits, virtues of every individual are in fact indispensable for the smooth and orderly functioning of human relationships and communities. Therefore, it is also possible to examine the virtues from the standpoint of the community to which people belong. The virtues can here be seen as the moral excellence of every individual’s actions, which is an embodiment of

the community's ideals, and the people learned and mastered them by themselves. It is from this standpoint that virtue is defined as the intention to behave in accordance with the social customs, laws, or moral norms.

However, human societies are constantly changing. And the virtues required also change according to the changes in society. For example, in a period of social stability when social order is relatively well maintained, the most highly valued virtues are trust, humbleness, discipline, benevolence and courtesy, as they are necessary to maintain order in a community and in the sphere of human relations. In contrast, in a period of instability when society is afflicted with a disturbance of the social order and is moving towards a new order, we may need virtues that correspond to the changing situation in a flexible way, such as wisdom, prudence and the like. Or in a transitional period when a new order should be formed out of disorder, it is rather virtues such as dignity, patience and courage which should be emphasized. The required virtues change depending on the situation and therefore are not absolute values.

Which virtues are considered important actually changes according to the social and historical context. The evaluation of virtues differs depending on the historical periods and their social conditions. On the one hand, when a society is going through a major upheaval, those values once positively approved in a stabilized society may change to the opposite, i.e. to a negative evaluation. On the other hand, the values viewed negatively in a state of order may be regarded positively.

In fact, according to Thucydides, an ancient Greek historian, in times of revolution or civil unrest, the meaning of words also significantly changes. Simply thoughtless violence may turn into patriotic courage, delay and slow decision trying to figure out what is to come would be interpreted as a cover used by the timid, and composure simply as an excuse of cowards.¹ When a society goes through drastic changes due to warfare and revolutions, so do the values which people appreciate.

Our value system is not strictly categorized nor fixated. Values are chosen depending on the situation that changes from time to time, and the moralities change accordingly. We should examine the definition of moralities taking into consideration the fact that they are relative to and correlated with the social fluidity and change.

VIRTUE OF TRUST

The virtue of trust is valid in a community where social order is relatively well preserved.

Let us take an example: just casually we catch a taxi in the street when we are in a hurry to reach our destination. As a rule, taxi drivers and passengers do not know each

other and they hardly relate to each other during the ride. But nevertheless we believe that the driver will keep the promise to take us to the place designated by us. The driver too trusts that the passengers will pay the fare if he or she takes them to their destination. Also, we usually do not worry about our safety in a taxi, although it may be possible for both sides, taxi drivers and passengers, to turn violent and do harm to the other. In fact, they trust each other.

In a society where the virtue of trust works this way, we are convinced that the others behave just as expected, and that if you deal with the others with sincerity, they will respond with equal sincerity. The virtue of trust strengthens and deepens the relationship established between you and me. Trust is essential for human relationships to be properly established. At the same time, the opposite is also true, trust works when people are on good terms with each other. If humans can be human only when interacting with each other, then trust is a virtue to make humans more human.

If trust of others exists in each individual, a human community will preserve its order. Order and stability in society correspond to the degree of social confidence: to which extent members of the society can trust one another. Where there is trust, there is solidarity. Where there is solidarity, there is trust. In this respect, the virtue of trust is an important asset for the self-perpetuation of a society.

Talking about « five human relations and five constant virtues », Mencius argues the necessity of the virtue of trust in order to establish order and closeness in human relations. One of the famous passages reads: “Between parent and child, there must be closeness. Between ruler and subject, there must be justice. Between husband and wife, there must be distinction. Between old and young, there must be order. Between friends, there must be trust.” Between parents and children there must be affection more than anything. Between rulers and subjects, consideration, respect and courtesy are required. Between husband and wife role allocation and distinction are necessary. Between the elderly and the young, there must be respect. Between friends trust is of foremost importance. These virtues, such as closeness, justice, distinction, order, trust, are as a whole summarized in the virtue of trust. If there is trust, human relations can be maintained in order. And vice versa, if human relations are maintained in order, there is trust.

On the other hand, once trust is betrayed, order in human relations cannot be maintained any longer. Or once order in human relations has collapsed there is no longer any trust. An act of betrayal is the most remarkable example of the collapse of trust. Here lies the reason why betrayal has long been denounced as evil, and sincerity and honesty are highly regarded instead.

And yet, a relationship of trust may be betrayed. In fact we know that it is quite often betrayed in our long life. And nevertheless we trust others, which is the virtue of trust. Even if you cannot perfectly foresee how others will behave, you trust them, which is the ultimate form of trust. Trust is thus an adventure, as is frequently alleged. It can be also said that human relations are based on this sort of adventure.

Trust is thus the most important virtue to make human relations and society possible. Despite being uncertain, people treat one another in an honest way and trust one another, which is indispensable to maintain our society. Only those who can trust others can trust the world and people. If one cannot trust others, we are always alone, suspicious and full of apprehension .

Aristotle discusses the virtue of *philia* [love, friendship] in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and defines it as an indispensable element for our life. He must have thought that trust was of the utmost importance for a community and that trust could only be established by our being strongly linked, having a relation of friendship and loving each other. No human being can live without close friends with whom you are in a trusting relationship. *Philia* also plays the role of a strong tie for the whole country, so that people can live in harmony. If there is *philia*, there is no need for justice. Our love, *philia* or friendship is either one of utility, of pleasure or of the good, and the one searching for the good is the true love, which is found only in the *philia* and friendship of the good people.² Aristotle regards *philia* as the most important element to establish human relations and our communities, because it is *philia* that forms trust.

The deepest *philia* may be the love of a mother for her child. Mothers raise children with deep affection, and children completely trust their mothers. This complete trust in their mothers serves as a starting point for children to learn to trust others, which provides the basis for human relations as well as harmony in society. In this respect, there is nothing greater and more precious than the deep and unsuspecting trust shown by infants. This trust is exclusively nurtured by love. It is therefore extremely sinful to betray the trust of those infants.

Confucianism highly values benevolence [仁], because a society of trust is seen to be built only by benevolence. According to the *Analects of Confucius*, benevolence means to love others.³ Or, benevolence should be understood as follows: if you want to make something happen, you let others make it happen as well, and before doing something to others, you should imagine how you would feel if they would do the same to you. In short, to be benevolent is to be considerate of others by putting oneself in others' shoes. The benevolence discussed in the *Analects* shows itself in the friendly affection which arises

spontaneously between people, and this benevolence implies to be honest to yourself, to think of the other's feelings, to suppress your own selfishness, and not to do to others what you do not want to be done to yourself. Indeed, if this kind of benevolence is fostered in people's mind, there is trust between them and harmony in society. This explains why Mencius regards the benevolent governance of the ruler practicing universal and impartial love as the ideal way to rule.⁴

Courtesy[礼], which Confucianism values together with benevolence, is an objective expression of benevolence. Courtesy is the way people should follow in order to keep order in society and to preserve human relations and exchanges in good condition. This courtesy cannot be irrelevant to benevolence. Courtesy is a social expression of the benevolent love between people. Benevolence should therefore follow the rules of courtesy: to go back to the rules of courtesy is benevolence. Love should have forms and has to be confirmed by what has shape and forms.⁵ Confucius thought : if people value courtesy, by which they make mutual concessions, the state is well governed.

Confucius suggested a nation should be based on courtesy supported by benevolence, because he believed it would be the way to build a society based on trust. Benevolence and courtesy, both lead to trust. The idea is well expressed in the famous passages in the Analects: "if a person lacks trustworthiness [信], I do not know what this person can be good for" or "if the people have no faith [信] in their rulers, there is no standing for the state."⁶ It is only by trust that human relations work well, creating an orderly and harmonious society. When the virtue of trust is valid, the society is maintained well ordered.

VIRTUE OF NON-TRUST

It can also be said that the virtue of trust is valid only when the order in that society is relatively well maintained. Once the order in a society has collapsed, the virtue of trust will collapse as well. If there is no trust, social breakdown will occur. On the other hand, if society collapses, trust will disappear. Human society may then experience a state of anomie and descend into chaos at any moment. If we must survive in a state of social disorganization and loss of trust, we may need another set of moralities, i.e. the virtue of non-trust: a moral principle such as "Don't trust anyone" or "Be cautious."

True, trusting others is an important virtue, but this trust is often betrayed in the real world. We cannot always trust people. Indeed, countless frauds are committed in numerous social spheres: advertisement, business, investment, moneymaking schemes, and even marriage. These are crimes that abuse trust in society, and at the same time they prove that the existence of a community of non-trust has a basis within a society of trust, and that a

disorder is hidden in an order. To cheat people is of course something bad, but if it is obvious that this kind of evil is rooted in our own society and you simply have to take it as a basic condition of social life, then those who fall easily victim to a scam, who are betrayed and cheated, may be regarded as stupid. In other words, we need a virtue of non-trust, which is, to be cautious and careful.

Even in an orderly society, there are organizations and structures presupposing non-trust rather than trust. Our society has a legal system, under which criminal laws, commercial laws, etc. are established based on the premise that murder, injury or fraud cases do exist. In the private sphere as well, we have our office building guarded by a security company, and we may take out a damage insurance, and of course we lock our own house. All this presupposes non-trust.

In the United States, one of the countries with the highest crime rate in the world, taxis have a metallic partition for security reasons to separate the taxi driver and the customers – a device that we never come across in Japan — and the taxi fare is handed over to the driver through a small hole in this partition. This bullet-proof shield also implies the lack of trust between drivers and passengers; this is a system that makes both sides wary of each other. It means that in a society lacking order the virtue of self-reliance, which is, behaving wisely and carefully, works better than the virtue of trusting others.

Human societies are constantly changing. Our rules and promises are not always kept unaltered, as situations change all the time. The virtue of trust means more than simply believing others; trust implies that you take a determined attitude towards the future, taking the relations with others as totally predictable. However, if the situation is changing, this kind of trust does not work any longer. Having too much confidence in others or in the future, you would be betrayed. If you intend to survive in a constantly changing situation, you are required to be careful based on an attitude of self-sustainability.

Both our life and society are constantly changing. Nobody knows whether or not my own ideas or others' will be the same in one year or two years' time. If this is the case, neither others nor I will know if we can keep our promises. Under this condition, it is not prudent to continue believing that promises will be kept. Those who have absolute trust in others in a human society that is continuously evolving would be either saintly or merely stupid.

For plain common-sense people, it would be sensible to assume that trust is often betrayed in this world and that nothing can be said to be certain, and then to prepare oneself for possible problems due to this lack of trust and certainty. With such prudence, one would not be driven to despair even though one experienced some betrayal. Society is not always in

good order, but rather unstable and constantly changing. If society changes, new moralities are required accordingly. And the moralities here mostly have to presuppose a lack of trust or non-trust.

It is today's international community in particular where mutual relations need to be based on non-trust. As a matter of fact, a number of multilateral and bilateral treaties are spreading like a net all over the world, which may seem to be building up an international community of trust. However, international relations are, even today, essentially and solely driven by the pursuit of each country's self-interest. Signing of an international treaty is based on the weighing of national interests. The international relations are relentlessly changing, and these national interests of every country are also constantly changing. The interests of a country change with the passage of time. And at times, international treaties may lose their meaning or be violated. Under these conditions, if a country keeps faith with international agreements, reposes confidence in other countries, and places its trust in the signed treaties, it would act against its own interest. Treaties between nations may become a mere façade and be broken at any time. National leaders are required to take this fact into consideration, and to deal flexibly with the actual situations. Here, non-trust rather than trust is the overarching fundamental principle.

Even though the same can be said about individual relations, the situation changes more drastically in the international community, and consequently international contracts and treaties are often broken. It can even be said that international politics consists of distrust among nations, and accordingly we have to be astute to manage to survive — like the feuding warlords during the turbulent Sengoku period — relying on distrust rather than trust. Apart from the international community, modern societies are generally characterized by a loss of trust. To live in a society of distrust, you may need to learn some sort of survival skills. In the natural world which is also constantly changing, excessively good-natured careless species fall prey to their enemies and go extinct. Every society contains some disorder.

Machiavelli who lived at the tempestuous time of the Italian Renaissance writes in *Il Principe* that rulers do not always have to keep their word. According to Machiavelli, those rulers who do not care about keeping faith and confuse people with their schemes would often end up achieving great things and overwhelming other rulers who seriously believe in keeping their word. So, when keeping faith leads in fact to disadvantages, or a promise loses its original cause, a virtuous ruler will not keep faith, and should not do it. As humans are evil and do not keep their word, rulers do not have to take trustworthiness seriously. According to Machiavelli, rulers often have to go against trustworthiness, mercy, humanity or religious belief in order to defend their country.⁷

Machiavelli's political philosophy which is based on distrust of the people thought deeply about life without trust and its difficulties. Machiavelli took the view that a breach of trust is not necessarily a vice. To survive in a turbulent age of distrust, rulers need to be strong like wild beasts: a virtuous ruler needs to be astute like a fox to discover the snares, and to be fierce like a lion to terrify the wolves, while those who think they can achieve victory with their virtue of modesty over the arrogance of their enemies even in an age of distrust would commit a mistake.⁸ If we reflect upon those times of disorder with their unstable social conditions, we have to conclude that the Machiavellian philosophy based on human distrust may be right. Machiavelli simply advocates the moralities humans should uphold in a chaotic situation.

Han Fei, a realistic political philosopher who lived during the Warring States period in China, also advances a philosophy based on this distrust of humanity. His idea is clearly expressed in his text: "It is dangerous for a ruler to trust others. He who trusts others can be manipulated by others." Han Fei even claims that a ruler should not trust his wife or his sons, the princes. Treacherous ministers, he argues, would certainly gain favor with the empress and the princes and would eventually dethrone him. Or the empress and the princes themselves may depose the emperor. If a ruler cannot even trust his wife or sons, how could he trust others.⁹

The same can be said about the ministers. Parental or conjugal love of course does not exist between a ruler and his ministers, a close and intimate relationship between them cannot be expected. A ruler and his ministers have distinct interests: the ministers always try to use everything the ruler says and does for their own interests. Therefore, a ruler should not expose his wishes and intentions which might give the ministers a chance to use their knowledge for a plot. According to Han Fei, a ruler should not even reveal his likes and dislikes.¹⁰

Han Fei's political philosophy is supported by a < philosophy of non-trust > or a philosophy of distrust based on a view of human nature as fundamentally bad. You should not trust people because they act only for their own interest, which is the opposite view of the < philosophy of trust > advanced by Confucius who said: "if the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state." And yet, this philosophy of distrust would be useful and necessary as a philosophy of life for anyone living in a crumbling and disorganized society. In other words, when a society disintegrates into chaos and given that people are evil by nature, the ideal of benevolence which Confucius once preached would be not only inappropriate, but just a thoughtless ideal. To continue advocating the virtue of trust in a state of political disorder is the dishonest attempt to escape from reality.

TRUST AND DISTRUST

The real society where humans lead their life maintains not only order to some degree, but has some disorder as well. There is disorder within order, order within disorder, both are closely intertwined, and thus society is evolving and transforming itself. Corresponding to the real society's changes — from order to disorder, or disorder to order — ethics represent the evolving society. Trust changes into distrust, for example, distrust into trust, and both are intertwined. If this is correct, we need not only the virtue of trust but that of non-trust at the same time.

When a Japanese father has his child jump off a high fence, he will be careful to catch it safely in his arms. By contrast — although I am not certain whether or not this is a true story — a Jewish father would step aside, let his child fall to the ground, and say: “Don't trust anyone!” Japanese teach the virtue of trust and Jews teach the virtue of non-trust. And yet, both are virtues and ethics essential to life. It depends on the situation which virtue you would need in your life. Here lies the reason why we must think about the ethics in real life, or the ethics that work in a changing society.

The sociologist Niklas Luhmann examines the question of trust in connection with that of complexity. According to Luhmann, the social environment we live in is characterized by an enormous complexity. In order to respond to this situation and to reduce its complexity, we have no other means but building trust in our social system. Without trust which means to rely on expectations we are attached to, we cannot cope with the external complexity. We reduce complexity by building up a variety of systems and creating trust in society, and by doing so we maintain trust itself.¹¹

And yet, society is characterized by extreme complexity and also uncertainty. We act by placing our trust in something, but we do not always achieve the expected result. We more likely come across unexpected results and feel disappointed. With trust there is always a possibility to be betrayed. Once betrayed, you would be the one to be blamed to have trusted. In a complex and uncertain situation, it may be even dangerous to maintain trust in the usual manner. What is required here is rather non-trust; you should take the necessary precautions because there is always a possibility that expectations will be betrayed.

The real society we live in is located between trust and non-trust. And, trust changes into distrust or distrust into trust, corresponding to each individual situation. If trust is valued to have a social function, it is because we recognize the possibility of non-trust. Furthermore, both trust and non-trust, having opposing functions, reduce the complexity of society. Both are rational modes of behavior in terms of the reduction of complexity. In Luhmann's theory

the social function of the dynamics of trust and non-trust is the reduction of complexity.¹² This can be explained by the view that society goes through a process in which order changes into disorder, disorder into order, and thus the two are closely intertwined. Luhmann also recognizes such an evolving society.

2. PHRONESIS AND COURAGE

PHRONESIS OR PRACTICAL WISDOM AND THE GOLDEN MEAN

If our society is evolving with order and disorder closely intertwined, we should think about ethics applicable to each changing situation and its corresponding moralities. The virtue Aristotle particularly valued is phronesis, which is practical wisdom to find out how to act better according to the changing situation. Here the criteria for action do not necessarily have to correspond with the general regulations or norms. What matters here instead is a kind of intuitive judgment to decide how to apply those rules and norms to the particular situation. If we are going to act according to the norms, we have to think about when, how and in which way we should proceed. In this case, the particular situation for action should be taken into consideration. It is the virtue of practical wisdom to think about the means and methods while giving serious thought to the particular circumstances of an action.

People endowed with phronesis are, according to Aristotle, those who explore perspicaciously what is good for and advantageous to themselves. Furthermore, they should be capable of thinking what is good and advantageous to their life not only in special cases but in general.¹³ Here we should understand that thinking about life in general includes considering the individual particular situation in which we are.

Phronesis or practical wisdom also means careful consideration. According to Otto Friedrich Bollnow, in order to carefully consider something, you have to keep a distance from it. A painter, for example, may step back and create a distance from the painting still in progress to see the work and its effect as a whole. The same can be said about careful consideration: we should abstractly contemplate a question by keeping a distance from the changing situation we are in, so as not to be biased by any disturbing influence.¹⁴ In a tense situation, we tend to be lost and forget what we are supposed to do, and it is the people endowed with phronesis who, undisturbed even at the centre of a crisis, can choose the most appropriate action in a broad perspective.

When we take action, we set an objective, think about the method of achieving it, take into account our own ability and the situation we are in, give careful consideration, and

choose one course of action. The virtue of phronesis manifests itself in the adequacy of this choice.

Therefore, phronesis also implies prudence. Bollnow says, prudence is based on a deep insight into and thinking about all the possible connections or linkages.¹⁵ A prudent person, through his insights and his ability to think, finds the most appropriate way in a given situation and overcomes his various difficulties in life. Also, this person does not panic even when the situations change, because the prudent person takes not only the current situation but also the future situation into consideration, and continues living his or her life in an appropriate manner. Prudence is thus a necessary virtue for us to live a better life.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle mentions Pericles as an example of a man of phronesis. Pericles, a statesman in ancient Greece in the 5th Century B.C., wrested power from the Areopagus which was controlled by the Athenian aristocracy at the time, and carried out a number of democratic reforms. According to Aristotle, Pericles is prudent because he is able to discern what is good for him, his people and for all human beings.¹⁶ If we read closely what Aristotle wrote about Pericles's life, we come to the conclusion that a person of phronesis is familiar with the community's norms and is able to apply them adequately and flexibly to respond to the ever-changing situations, and to find and choose the right direction for the people.

In order to examine what phronesis is, it would be a good way to examine its opposite, imprudence. According to Bollnow, imprudent people are indiscreet and act merely on impulse without carefully considering the situation in which they are. They understand what they are doing, but do not see the numerous consequences their action entails. At the same time, as they do not carefully consider all kinds of risks, they may expose themselves to dangers.¹⁷

This perspective shows us that phronesis and imprudence are both relative to the constantly changing situation. It is an act of phronesis to choose one's own action taking into account the relation between the constantly changing situation and oneself, and the opposite an act of imprudence.

The « golden mean », which Aristotle values highly together with practical wisdom or phronesis, is a virtue which reason imposes upon emotions, and therefore can be also categorized as part of the virtue of phronesis. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtues are in fact golden means which are found between excess and deficiency, the two worst extremes, and keep the middle ground. For example, courage is between foolhardiness and cowardice, and dignity between arrogance and servility, temperance between insensibility and profligacy, liberality between prodigality and meanness,

truthfulness between vanity and self-depreciation, gentleness between irascibility and spiritlessness, wittiness between buffoonery and boorishness, friendliness between flattery and obsequiousness.¹⁸

If we always have to consider the desirable golden mean whenever we take action, this middle ground should inevitably result from the relationship between the situation of our action and ourselves. Actions have to be taken at the right time, on the right matters, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner. When thinking about the desirable means of action, we have to think about this kind of situation. The golden mean does not mean moderation, but a value of excellence which follows necessarily from the relation between the situation and oneself. It must be said that we need a prudence that always takes the situation into account. Therefore, the position of the golden mean changes in accordance with the change of the situation. It would be right to assume that the virtue of the golden mean of Aristotle also has a dynamic aspect.

COURAGE

Even if society is evolving with its order changing into disorder, disorder into order, and both closely intertwined, and if the situation changes accordingly, these fluxes and changes do not occur spontaneously. Changes in social conditions take place because of our actions under these conditions. It is our actions that reorganize relationships, alter connections and find a way out of the impasse. If so, it will not be enough for us to act by taking into account the changing situation, giving a deep consideration or phronesis to the relationships, obtaining the golden mean and adapting ourselves to the given situation. Rather, what is required here are positive acts: acts of changing relationships, altering connections and finding a way out of the impasse.

This is why the virtue of courage is highly regarded. The virtue of courage has been a particularly highly regarded virtue from ancient times both in the West and in the East. It is about our willpower based on which we achieve great things and accomplish pioneering feats, and even in the face of difficulties, we do not surrender but doggedly hold out against them. Aristotle too declares that a courageous person is one who is unperturbed in the presence of terrors and comports himself rightly towards them. Such a person endures pain, fearless of even what may bring death, and executes things.¹⁹

Therefore, a person of courage keeps up a resolute attitude when carrying out his plans. This person, without succumbing to hardship or temptation, will resolutely defend his or her decisions and conviction with an indomitable spirit and unfaltering will. It is the courageous

person's virtue that even when suffering the most devastating fate, his or her proud and unshaken spirit will never be broken.

A courageous person is bold when it comes to planning, and makes a bold decision to open up a new frontier even if other people do not approve of it because of their hidebound attitude. What this person trusts is not other people, nor the common sense accepted by others, but his or her own planning, consideration and execution. With all this, the courageous person is going into the future.²⁰

This virtue of courage has long been respected as the virtue of the warrior who spends most of his life waging war or of a hero who accomplished great feats that would go down in history, because they had to realize their plans under circumstances where they were always exposed to the fear of death. But this virtue of courage is essential not only for heroes and warriors but also for politicians, scholars, entrepreneurs, adventurers, athletes, ordinary citizens, or whoever it is when a new frontier needs to be opened up.

In order to understand the virtue of courage, it will be useful to examine its opposite, cowardice. A coward who, in the face of danger, is just too shaken up and in fear of his life, always is frightened by the danger and backs down from it. In his or her actions a coward is irresolute and timid and unable to make a decision. Furthermore, a coward without enough endurance easily feels dispirited in the face of difficulties. This weak will is what we call cowardice. A coward is not able to accomplish a great feat.

Courage is the willpower to overcome the cowardice inherent in every human being, and then proceed to action. However, this does not simply mean that we should impassively confront problems, without anticipating difficulties at all and without fear of dangers or holding life in high esteem. Such an attitude often turns out to be foolhardiness. That is why Aristotle placed the virtue of courage between this foolhardiness and cowardice.

It is not enough, however, for courage to remain moderately in the middle ground between foolhardiness and cowardice. Courage of that level may be enough for us just to survive adapting to the changing situation. But if we have to make a breakthrough in an extremely difficult situation and create new things, what we need is a type of fortitude which looks almost like recklessness and boldness which looks almost like arrogance. At the same time, to find a way out of the impasse, we need at times discretion which looks almost like cowardice.

In fact, in our country's history, as proven by the rebellion of Oshio Heihachiro, quite often some foolhardy, almost insane actions can bring about the beginning of a new age. They are also an example of heroic and courageous acts. By contrast, if an army general facing extreme dangers and difficulties decides to retreat in order to save his soldiers' life

even if he might be blamed for being a coward, this act also should be regarded as a courageous act.

If so, foolhardiness is a virtue, and so is cowardice. Or, both foolhardiness and cowardice could be the positive virtue of courage. It is the situation in which we find ourselves that makes the virtue of courage go from one extreme to the other and constantly change its focal point. We may need boldness — almost foolhardiness — or prudence — almost cowardice — depending on each different situation. In a sense, a courageous act that rejects the golden mean can find a way out of an impasse.

This kind of courage is necessary, however, not only for a hero or an army general but also for ordinary citizens. Whatever people are saying, in which direction the trend in public opinion is moving, you have the courage of your convictions and you are adamant about them; such a courageous act is a virtue that should be highly respected.

Among other things, in case an injustice is being committed, you need courage to speak out against it even if this upsets and annoys other people. Your accusation may cause others to retaliate and you could be hurt as a consequence. It is a courageous act if you raise your voice against injustice despite all that. True, it is safer for us to follow the general trend and conform to the climate of opinion rather than resisting them in our daily life, because we may put ourselves in danger by telling the honest truth. But real self-fulfillment is found in the courage to advocate truth. In the everyday lives of citizens too, this courage is necessary. Here, the attitude of constant worrying about the relationships with others and the harmony in the community becomes in fact a negative value. What is positively valued changes according to the situations.

Generally speaking, the virtue of courage as explained above can be categorized as the virtue of a hero, including the heroes among the citizens: the challenge of difficulties, endurance of pains and suffering, and so on, they call for the virtue of courage that supports heroes. The virtue of courage is the virtue of a hero striving after a higher level of morality, which implies a solitude ordinary people can hardly imagine. Therefore, for ordinary citizens and mediocre people, the hero's courageous act confronting obstacles and enduring pain may seem to be something beyond their imagination. The heroism of the virtue of courage is not necessarily elegant, restrained, refined and moderate. Rather, it is the morality of those exceptional people and rebels who defy the current of opinion, reject the mediocre, refuse the worldly happiness, and yet intend to create something new.

Therefore, a heroic act causes disorder. If society is in a stable condition maintaining order relatively well, the virtues required here are for example docility, humbleness, loyalty, faithfulness, obedience, and there is no room for the hero's creative virtue. However, a

society of excessive order means a rigid society impeding the free and dynamic vitality of life, and faithfulness turns into a backward rigidity. And this is the moment when heroic courage is required.

Indeed, whenever a hero performs a courageous act without being biased against anything, disorder ensues. But this is a chaos which is necessary to create a new order out of disorder. A courageous act turns an existing order into a new order, an existing situation into a new situation, and this process entails disorder and chaos. A great creation is made out of disorder and chaos. Nietzsche who wrote “courage is the best killer”²¹ also emphasized this creative virtue.

VIRTUE AS POWER

The original meaning of the Greek word arete was “masculinity” or “remarkable fighting ability,” in short, “courage,” and it changed its meaning to “excellence in everything we do.” The Latin word virtus [virtue] is derived from vir [male] and originally meant “masculinity” “courage” and “power.” It then finally came to mean “excellence in general.”

According to Aristotle, virtue or arete in the sense of excellence “causes that of which it is a virtue to be in a good < state > and to perform its characteristic activity well.” In other words, it is the abilities which all things and living beings possess. For example, the virtue of excellence in the eye is having a good eyesight, and the virtue of the horse is running fast.²² Whether it is a flute-player, a sculptor, a carpenter, weaver, or whoever has a skill, the good is thought to be found in that characteristic activity, and their abilities and skills are their virtues. It is this virtue in terms of excellence that was thought to be the good.²³

The statement of Aristotle, “the human good, agathon, turns out to be activity of the soul, energeia, in accordance with virtue, arete”²⁴ should be understood in this context. The good in this sense is put into practice [praxis] with the activity itself as its objective. In the case of poiesis or production as a means of producing a piece of work, it is the result which is examined whether it is good or bad, while in the case of praxis, the act itself is examined whether it is good or bad. The objective of praxis is to lead a good life. Here, the < good > refers to the very virtue in terms of excellence, representing the aim in life. To have an excellent ability, to improve it, and to create new things, these constitute the good and the good life. The virtue in this respect is a virtue indispensable for creating new things and moving society forward.

Virtù, the term presented by Machiavelli, which is an Italianization of the Latin virtus, refers to the human talent to achieve great things and to the power that drives a human being into action. For Machiavelli, the success or failure of an enterprise does not depend on

whether or not the underlying theory is right, but on the power to accomplish it, the willpower, the ability to see through things and to make a decision. For Machiavelli, virtue is nothing but power.

True, human actions must follow the cycle of nature, or fate. Humans are powerless before fate. But no matter how the inevitable power interferes, the consequences can be different depending on the way humans respond to it. If humans make use of the power given to them by nature, they may hope to be able to control the external power. There is hardly any situation which should be regarded as completely hopeless.

It is this confidence in the human power in the face of fate that led Machiavelli to his famous concept of *virtù* and *fortuna* or fate. He argues that *fortuna* is not necessarily an inevitability uncontrollable by humans, but that there is a moment in which humans have a chance of controlling fate. Therefore, humans have to possess *virtù* or the power to control fate. This power is the human virtue par excellence. If you stand firm while the situation changes, fate will never affect you. Machiavelli is convinced that humans have the power to shape their own fate, and that is why he valued a classic virtue like honorable courage higher than Christian virtues such as humbleness or obedience.

The human world is constantly changing from order to disorder, and from disorder to order. Virtues such as trust, humbleness, obedience, loyalty are necessary if the social order is relatively well maintained. However, such a well ordered society does not last forever, but is always changing. What we need in our changing society is the virtue of *phronesis* that decides how to act taking into account the changing situation. Furthermore, that situation does not simply automatically change but its change is affected by our actions in the interconnectedness of things. If so, there should be the creative act of breaking new ground, and also creative virtues to accompany this act, such as: courage, excellence and power. It is exactly because of these virtues that the human world is always evolving and transforming itself. Not only are there actions because of the evolution and transformation, but these creative changes occur because of actions. It should be understood that the virtues required in a society are changing in many different ways and values are fluctuating accordingly, corresponding to the evolution and transformation of society.

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Note

- ¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, vol. III-82.
- ² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a.
- ³ Confucius, *Analects*, Book XII: Yen Yüan.
- ⁴ Mencius, *Mencius*, Li Lou: Part 1.
- ⁵ Confucius, *op. cit.*, Book XII: Yen Yüan.
- ⁶ Confucius, *op. cit.*, Book II: Wei zheng, Book XII: Yen Yüan.
- ⁷ Machiavelli, Niccolò, *Il Principe*.18
- ⁸ *Ibid.*18
- ⁹ Han Fei, 'Bei nei' Han Feizi.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* 'Zhu dao.'
- ¹¹ Luhmann, Niklas, *Vertrauen* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1989), p. 4.
- ¹² *Ibid.* p. 12.
- ¹³ Aristotle, *op. cit.*, 1140a.
- ¹⁴ Bollnow, Otto Friedrich, *Wesen und Wandel der Tugenden* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1975), pp. 95-98.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
- ¹⁶ Aristotle, *op. cit.*, 1140b.
- ¹⁷ Bollnow, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-95.
- ¹⁸ Aristotle, *op. cit.*, 1106a-1108b.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1115a, 1117a.
- ²⁰ Bollnow, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-83.
- ²¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Also sprach Zarathustra, Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1964), p. 172.
- ²² Aristotle, *op.cit.*, 1106a.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 1097b.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1098a.