

Education and The Four-Way Test of Rotary

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When I was teaching at Osaka university in 1975, I began, prompted by chance, to extend my lecturing service to senior high schools to teach high polymer chemistry, and as time went on, those schools came to cover elementary schools and junior high schools. Since I became a member of the Rotary Club in 1996, I also found it part of my social service as a Rotarian to offer my lecture to various schools. Since 2007, when I ceased to engage in teaching and research by profession, I have devoted myself to offer my lecturing service as part of social service as a Rotarian. These days, I have extended the topic of my lecture beyond my specialized field of polymer science to include such subjects as “My thoughts during and after the World War II”, “Ingenious ideas in ancient Japanese wooden houses,” “Thoughts about moral,” and “How to make the aging society thrive with fewer children.” On such occasions, I have come to realize that the Rotary’s Four-Way Test in a question-and-answer form serves as a good teaching material and offer various hints from educational and learning standpoints when I tell children about science and moral. So I would like to discuss several related subjects here.

Moral Capacity and the Four-Way Test (Ref. 1)

I have a strong impression that recently there are increasing opportunities than ever before when we see or hear news about affairs which are not explainable other than due to the lack of private moral capacity or professional ethics. The Article 2, paragraph (1), of the Basic Act on Education of Japan, says “education shall aim at cultivating a rich sensitivity and a sense of morality,” while paragraph (3) of the same Article provides that mutual respect and cooperation shall be valued. Japanese elementary and junior high schools provide one lesson once a week, 35 lessons a year altogether, to teach moral to pupils and students. I was wondering what attitude those school children would take in learning a lesson on moral. So I myself wanted to talk with these children about moral, and this prompted me to add the subject of moral to my school delivery lessons. By the way, if I am asked “what is moral?” I would find it unexpectedly hard to answer such a question aside from the explanation described in the dictionary. So I make it a rule to talk about moral as a moral capacity.

With the progress of science and technology, various systems of the society have become diverse and complex, forcing members of the society to change their moral capability little by little. In my view, there is no question that the fundamental of moral capability required for human to live is still nothing but the ability to judge, based on one’s knowledge acquired thus far up to that point in time, how he or she should behave toward the natural environment including other people, plants and animals. In order to exercise one’s moral capability, it would be difficult to do so unless he or she is capable of communicating with plants and animals other than humans so that he or she is able to make a judgment as to what kind of attitude he or she should take toward them, and to judge whether such a judgment was appropriate or not. Since plants and animals plus those things other than humans do not speak human language, there is no choice but to depend on imagination in order to communicate with them. Also for humans to live a

legitimate life as the members of the society, it would be necessary for them to learn from the past and to forecast future. For this purpose, ability would be required to communicate, by using imagination, with the people who have already passed away as well as with those people who would be born to this world in the future. There may be cases when imagination is needed to understand each other among the people who are capable to talk among themselves. Besides, you would of course have to consider not only your home country but also other countries when it comes to the natural environment including humans other than yourself, plants and animals. Given in such a way, I hope you will understand well that the fundamental power to exercise moral capability is imagination based on knowledge. Thus it may well be said that the fundamental power to live is imagination.

Imagination is also the root of creativity. When something new or a new concept is created, imagination is necessary. First, think of a new thing or concept and imagine a route leading to it based on the knowledge acquired till then. You should try to create a new thing or concept by experimenting along such a route or discussing with others. If it doesn't work, try some other route by using your imagination. An excellent idea or instinct born during this process must be the result of imagination. When you put imagination to practice and verify its result, and repeat the same process to achieve your objective and have created a new thing or concept, the accumulated result of your imagination will be evaluated by others as creativity. If you think along such a way, a person with a rich imagination should not only be able to display creativity but will be considered as the person with high moral capability only if his or her criterion of judgment on right and wrong is secure.

In the field of science, things or concepts newly created as the results of creativity of scientists and engineers should primarily be used only to realize happiness and peace for the people of the world. However, there is such a thing as the nuclear weapon which is used only for the benefit of a certain country, with the possibility of plunging many people into an unhappy situation. In order to prevent such a thing from happening, it is essential to keep up strenuous efforts to develop the nation who have a secure criterion of right and wrong with high moral capability. This is the reason why "moral" is one of important subjects in compulsory education.

In the meantime, when one says this and that or when one takes such actions, the criterion of judgment used to refer to in doing such things is not the external criterion already determined like the law, but is the internal criterion held by each individual in his or her mind, in other words, the criterion of judgment shown by, so to speak, another person inside himself or herself. Therefore, such a criterion is unique to each individual and varies slightly with each person, but such a difference, if too large, would cause various inconveniences in many ways. To avoid such a circumstance, it is necessary to keep each person's criterion of judgment uniform to a certain extent. The class of "moral" should aim, instead of focusing on one criterion to teach it to students, at helping each student develop his or her ability to build his or her own criterion unique to each student but with a certain uniformity. I will show you below "The Four-Way Test of Rotary" (Ref. 2) which is recommended for all Rotarians to use in evaluating their daily conduct. In my view, this Four-Way Test is made up of questions and answers which are put together in a concise and appropriate manner so that not only Rotarians but also ordinary citizens will be able to understand the criterion of judgment on right and wrong to help humans lead a social life.

<The Four-Way Test>

Of the things we think, say or do.

- 1) Is it the **TRUTH** ?
- 2) Is it **FAIR** to all concerned ?
- 3) Will it build **GOOD WILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIP** ?
- 4) Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned ?

First, instead of simply taking the words “Is it the **TRUTH**?” to mean whether there is or isn’t any lie or deceit in my conduct, I think it better to consider a little more deeply and interpret these words as meaning “Is my conduct in compliance with the ground rule or basic principle of things?.”

The second question, “Is it **FAIR** to all concerned?” means that one should deal with things in an unbiased manner without letting any private feeling interpose so much. In other words, is he or she an existence like the sun? The Truth at times includes, as will be described later, elements of belief. It may be said that those words are hinting that extra consideration is needed not to embarrass the other party.

The question “Will it build **GOOD WILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIP** ?” shows how to keep company with others in a very natural and basic manner when dealing with people other than yourself and with things like plants and animals., but it may be unavoidable here to mix a private feeling to some extent. It is important to remember that such a feeling should not be such that excludes others.

The moral criterion provides a norm as to what kind of attitude one should take toward others when he or she wishes to take some action. Such a norm must naturally have a consideration for enabling the other party to respond and take some action. This kind of consideration is considered to represent “Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned ?” This question may be interpreted as admonishing him or her for having private feeling too deeply when he or she judges the problem through the question of “Will it build **GOOD WILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIP**”

I would like to take a few moments here to think about the “**TRUTH**” described in the first question, “Is it the **TRUTH**?,” the starting point of the Four-Way Test. As mentioned above, the Truth composes the fundamental principle of things, that is, the thinking that lies at the base of various facts related to each other and explains their relations well. As many accurate facts are accumulated with the passing of time, the fundamental principle governing them also deepens little by little. In other words, the Truth further deepens with the times. The Truth may also vary with individuals. Even if one person should happen to know the same fact, his or her fundamental principle or the Truth extracted by him or her could depend on his or her personal experience or acumen. In that sense, the Truth may at times involve the belief of that person or have the character of his or her conviction. The fact may also show some bias depending on the place. Therefore, it follows that the Truth based on the fact may somewhat differ depending on that place. It may be said that the Truth gradually deepens and converges into absolute one thing over a long, long time while showing some kind of fluctuation with the people, times and places surrounding it. Hence, it follows that the norm of action in the society is not absolute one thing but shows some kind of fluctuations with the people, times and places surrounding it.

The fundamental of the Four-Way Test is the first question, “Is it the **TRUTH** ?” So that such a test will not sound like a narrow-minded obtusion as may be noticed in one’s own belief, the moral norm, which

may seem square-toed depending on how you take it, is extremely well-described in a gentle and calm manner by putting together short words and making them redeem each other. The Four-Way Test is composed of the four questions but it is important to evaluate one's own conduct by regarding the Four-Way Test as one fused test as a whole without thinking of each of the question separately as an independent test. .

When I once gave my lecture on moral to about 100 ninth-grade students of some junior high school up to this point, they listened to me intensely although they seemed somewhat surprised and puzzled at my talk that was different from the content of the normal lesson they had received. Later I read those students' written impression about my lecture, and learnt that nearly 20% of them wrote their impressions responding that "The Four-Way Test was understandable or can be accepted as the criterion of right and wrong." One of the students says "The talk on 'What is moral?' touched upon the fundamental of thinking and was found very useful. Especially, the Four-Way Test is very understandable as a criterion to evaluate right and wrong, and can be applied to our daily life. The Four-Way Test helps to offer answers to each question on "For what purpose do I do this?" Judging from this opinion, it is clear that the Four-Way Test has a power to appeal even to junior high school students. Another student says "I thought it difficult to judge on right and wrong and distinguish them. Although the Test says, 'Is it beneficial to all concerned?' if and when my conduct is found helpful for a majority of people but is not helpful for a handful of people, I found myself at a loss to judge which is right or wrong. Which do you think, Sensei?" I do hope to see this student again and talk with him.

Let Education Help Learn the Basic Principle

In the meantime, in my view, the traditional education in Japan has mainly focused on having students acquire knowledge, and has neglected to let students and teachers think together over the basic principle of things as hard as they can. Therefore, I am sometimes tempted even to say that they have forgotten to let the students learn the basic principle, that is, the truth lying at the very base of the Four-Way Test. In the school lesson on science, density is normally taught at the junior high school level. First, teach the definition of density which is the result of the mass divided by the volume. After that, let students calculate the volume of a certain substance provided that the density of the substance weighing 1 gram is 2. However, until those students were taught about the density, they had not learnt about the concept of molecule, which is the basic principle of chemistry. All substances are composed of molecule which is a very tiny particle invisible to the eye. So, when the student is asked why the wooden central pillar far heavier than a 10-yen copper coin floats in the water while the 10-yen copper coin sinks, he or she would be able to answer that it is because the density of the 10-yen copper coin is larger than the density of water, (=1), while the density of the wooden central pillar is smaller than 1, but he or she cannot answer what has caused the difference in density between the two substances. However, when I asked a question to students at some junior high school what they thought determined the size of density after I told them the concept of molecule, one of the students immediately answered "the mass of molecule." So I asked again, "Is that all?" Then another student said in reply, "It depends on how the molecule is packed. If the molecule is packed in tight, its density could become larger even when the mass of each molecule is not large enough." I was extremely

glad to hear that, and at the same time felt strongly that we had to make more and more efforts to push forward the education of the basic principle even if it may take time.

Also during the lesson of chemical reaction, it must certainly be interesting to see that the squeeze of a blue morning glory flower changes its color from blue to red when a small amount of vinegar is added. But such an experiment will only serve to give the students a lesson to learn the chemical phenomenon by rote. Instead of such an experiment, however, the children's thinking will become larger and wider if they are taught that the chemical reaction is a change in molecular state where a molecule and another molecule collide with each other, breaking the bond between the atoms and creating a new molecule by forming a new bond between the atoms $A-B + C-D \rightarrow A-D + C-B$). It would produce a more effective result in learning to teach about chemical reaction in concrete form by using a molecular model. I do hope that elementary school and junior high school teachers would try to think of ways and means to teach such a thing as the basic principle without saying that it is too difficult for them to teach. When the fundamental principle in a certain field seems too difficult for the teacher to teach, I hope, he or she would turn to an outside expert for providing a special lesson by delivery to his or her school. The true expert in the real sense of the word should always be capable of talking about such a difficult thing in the words understandable by laymen.

In general, it would take time more or less to have students learn about the basic principle. When I was of elementary school age, I went to see my teacher after school when he or she stayed at the school on night duty. I asked the teacher to take time in teaching me about a difficult thing or two. Otherwise, I talked with my teacher together with my parents when the teacher came to my house for a home visit. I felt that the personal feeling of friendliness and trust between the teacher and his or her students became stronger little by little not only at schoolrooms but also on such occasions. Teachers were also trying to make a friendly atmosphere and become familiar with their students, for example, by playing baseball or dodge ball with them after school. Students tend to like their teachers with their personal feelings for sure. When some students like a certain teacher, the teacher in turn comes to like the students naturally because of his or her personal feeling as a matter of course. It is a heart-to-heart interaction, but at the same time other children may think the teacher likes that student because of favoritism. There have been many talks of this kind since a long time ago. Many of those children who were said to be favored by their teachers were mostly aspiring and got good grades. The question is whether or not consideration was given from the educational viewpoint so as not to leave such a personal feeling merely as it is. If the children's eagerness and level of learning could be further raised up by responding to their expectations for their favoritism toward their teachers, that is truly the action that meets the truth of education which is in other words the basic principle of education whose aim is to develop the children's ability to the maximum extent possible, I think. However, care must be taken so that the teachers' affection toward the other children will not be weakened. The basics of the Rotary Four-Way Test is that the conduct based on the truth must be impartial and fair all the way through like the bright sun shining on a sunny day. At the same time, it is important to see whether or not the children, who have been able to develop their ability to the maximum extent possible with the help of such a teacher, would be able to exert such an impact to the other children in some way or other. The deepening effect of friendliness and fellowship between the particular teacher and the student

should develop in such a way as to benefit as many students as possible. This fits the spirit of the Four-Way Test.

However, it would be very difficult to make the Four-Way Test spirit effective as described here if the abilities of the students and their level of proficiency in one class are spread too far and wide. In Finland which topped the PISA test compiled by OECD, we hear, poor performers in their junior high schools were assigned to special classes or given supplementary lessons. In this way not only poor-performing students were able to raise their level of proficiency but also successfully-performing students were given special education corresponding to their level, resulting in the overall improvement of the students' level of proficiency. Because poor-performing students are not forced to receive higher-level lessons, both teachers and students should be able to study at ease (Ref. 3).

Truth about the Grade Retention (Grade Repetition) (Ref. 4)

At this point, I would like to mention briefly about the Grade Retention or Grade Repetition which is posing one of the key issues surrounding the fundamental of education. There are two ways of thinking about the compulsory education. One is based on age, and the other on curriculum. The former system moves up students to a upper class and graduate them as they get older regardless of the level of their proficiency. The latter system let students stay over beyond the regular academic year until they are able to finish the normally required course. In the latter case, an upper limit is set on the length of study to qualify them for graduation. In Japan, as age takes priority in principle, the Grade Retention is rarely practiced not only in the compulsory education as a matter of course but also in senior high schools.

In Finland, whether he or she can move up to enter a senior high school depends on the academic performance of the student concerned at the time of graduation from his or her junior high school. If he or she thinks the level of his or her academic record is not high enough, he or she can repeat the course at the same level in the same junior high school for one more academic year. In such a case, he or she will not be called a "dropout," but on the contrary, will be even considered that the student concerned studied for a longer period of time than usual (Ref. 3). In France, the compulsory education is applied to children from 6 years of age up to 15 years of age. The elementary school provides 5 academic years while the junior high school allows 4 academic years for education. When a student has to take a long leave of absence due to illness, he or she will be allowed to repeat the same educational course if his or her parents so wish. To the contrary, poorly-performing children are moved up to the next academic year at the discretion of school authorities. The grade retention in the same academic year is done only when it is clear that such a step will produce a better result for the student than otherwise. Any form of ineffective grade retention is considered meaningless. In this sense, the grade retention considered in Japan has a little different meaning from that in France. The data surveyed in Japanese high schools denote that schools with higher repetition rates tend to show higher rates of dropouts. These data appear to verify the French way of thinking that the grade retention should be practiced only when it is clear that such a step is effective for the sake of the student concerned.

Sometime ago when I (the writer of this essay) lived with my family in the United States, I was asked by the teacher of my eldest son to consult with him about my son because he had to repeat the same

educational course of the 6th grade for one more year due to his insufficient knowledge of the English language. This situation was a little different from France. But on second thought, I felt that the teacher's decision was in favor of my son as it would be more effective for my son to study a little more about English than moving up to a junior high school in despite of his insufficient knowledge about English. This elementary school was attached to the School of Education of the University of Massachusetts. Thus two post-graduate course students were assigned to each class as assistant teachers to pay sufficient and proper attention also to repeaters. I thought it really was a comfortable environment for education. The truth about the Grade Retention is that its fundamental principle is to motivate students at the low level to learn well and improve their level of proficiency. It is not a punishment to poorly-performing students. I think that there must be many options to administration systems for achieving its fundamental goal. But it is clear that it would be meaningless if the student is just let to repeat the same educational course for another academic year. In my view, those of us involved in the Japanese educational system must pay a little more attention to this point, and consider ways and means to make more effective use of this system in a more positive atmosphere.

Let Us Create a Relaxed Society through the Four-Way Test

Finland, which topped the results of the international PISA surveyed by OECD as previously mentioned, is implementing a five-day-week system with much less time assigned for class lessons than Japan. In the meantime, more time is spent than Japan for what is called Integrated Learning* and the contents of education are very much like the Yutori Education (relaxed education or education free from pressure) in Japan (Ref. 3). As the PISA results of Japan did not favorably compare with those of other countries, Japan, simply concerned with the ups and downs of the PISA results, is now trying to pack knowledge into its students by increasing school hours, departing from the Integrated Learning and Yutori Education. But I cannot help having the impression that this present trend in Japan is taking self-study hours away from students, heading for a wrong direction. We think that even if still more hours are put into the coursework centered around the acquisition of knowledge, children's scholastic ability will not improve unless we develop them to study by themselves even outside school. And what is more, the nation's strength will only wane. School hours allotted for integrated learning lesson were commenced first with the aim of developing and enabling students to build the habit of addressing their study at their own initiative in collaboration with other students. This is important for inspiring the students to study by themselves. A relaxed time is not only important but also essential for children to study by themselves. A relaxed time is needed not only for children and students but also teachers alike. If teachers are placed in such a situation as they cannot afford time to talk with their students after school, how can they be expected to perform decent education? Here at this point again, the truth of education is being questioned.

*Integrated learning aims at developing students' ability to function effectively in today's knowledge-based society through the promotion of skills such as independent learning, subjective judgment, problem solving, and self-motivation.

A little aside from the captioned subject, professors of Japanese national universities were not allowed to take a leave of absence when they visited foreign countries on official business before all of Japan's national universities became independent corporations by law. Unless they took advantage of such a chance, they would not be able to have another opportunity otherwise to visit even nearby places of interest, such as famous art museums or other museums, or scenic spots or other places of historical interest. As a result, they had to give up the hope of enhancing their cultural literacy and return to Japan. Is this rule consistent with the truth of the educational world? The author considers that this is a case where a fair tolerance, not a simple tolerance, should be applied. Suppose that the professor on an overseas trip for official business wishes to visit art museums or other museums to enhance his or her cultural literacy and use such a knowledge for his or her educational activity in the future. Such a conduct, even if it has nothing to do directly with the purpose of his or her trip, is an act which meets the purpose of education in Japan in accordance with the provision of Article 1 (Aims of Education) of the Basic Act on Education (Act No. 120 of 2006) in Japan, which reads, "Education shall aim for the full development of personality and strive to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who are imbued with the qualities necessary for those who form a peaceful and democratic state and society." Mere application of law according to rule can be done with the use of computers. The author considers that fair tolerance must be applied even to such an act as application of laws. Although it may seem to sound contradictory to say that there must be tolerance in the application of laws, it is not so. Without mentioning the Four-Way Test, all conducts in this society must be done fairly according to the truth, in other words the fundamental principle. However, what is meant by truth or fairness usually differs somewhat depending on various circumstances, such as the existing society or surroundings or people or the times. Such a meaning is never the only one nor is the same in all cases throughout all societies. Therefore, conducts consistent with the truth cannot be done without tolerance. We do not find many places in Japan where we can discuss such complex and varied problems. Especially, in order to offer these things for public discussion, most of those people who participate in such a discussion must be capable of judging precisely whether or not such a discussion was done fairly according to the fundamental principle of things and whether or not the result of such a discussion will benefit all parties concerned by deepening the goodwill and friendship of as many people as possible. Unless such an arena exercises its function properly, the society will tend to lack tolerance and comfort, concentrated on laws, and knows nothing but to give a prim and stiff response like "You must not do it for whatever reason you may have" in such a situation as visits to museums or art museums as mentioned before. Lastly, I would like to conclude my remarks by stating again that the Four-Way Test should be extremely useful when considering how the wisdom of living should function in order to build an affluent and comfortable society.

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