

An ethical consideration concerning “work, occupation and labor”

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The present condition of “work, occupation and labor” is much transformed by economical globalization. Under the policy based on the principle of market a lot of people has lost their jobs or suffered from the insecure and cheap part-time labor. There would be three topics to be discussed on this theme in the Japanese Society for Ethics, many members of which identify themselves as moral philosophers, teaching staffs in universities, and scholars. At first what suggestions can moral philosophers offer against this predicament? Secondly what should teaching staffs in universities learn from it and convey to younger generation? Thirdly how should scholars deal with the fact that the principle of market is also going to govern scientific research and education?

A narrative has been told about “work, occupation and labor”: youngsters aim at a certain “work” according to their endowments and dispositions. After discipline they come to obtain their “occupations”. Then they become full-fledged workers so that they are admitted to the network of human relation helping mutually. Their “labor” enables to support themselves (and their families). I call it “a narrative of a full-fledged worker”. But it now collapses because of the rapid restructure in industry and insecure employment. If people assimilate themselves to the principle of market, they might find no value in themselves and lose self-confidence. Why does man work at all? The purpose is to fulfill the needs for human life. At present many people cannot meet them. Therefore they should be somewhat satisfied prior to the individual’s worth or entitlement for it. I say “priority”. The reason for it is that although labor provides people with the worth or entitlement, some people can hardly seize the opportunities for working. Thus the network of human relation for reciprocal help should be enlarged to include those who are not full-fledged workers. Moral philosophers in Japan ought to focus more and more upon the process of acknowledging each other as a member of this network.

In academic education two ideas should be more emphasized: social contract and human dignity. The former helps to weave a social network with intention and the latter prevents from evaluating the own and the other persons in terms of market value. And scholars should call attention to the danger to scientific research and education brought about by the principle of market, because it tends to be subject to transient demand.