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Note for Joint Seminar on:

**The Moral and Political Foundations of Social Justice
in an Interdependent World**

**Foundations of Social Justice and Injustice:
The Inequality Between Generations**

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Key phrases:

1. Absolute justice is not definable.
2. Inequality between generations, rather than that among the contemporary people, has to be paid more attention as the issue of social justice.
3. Marginal happiness diminishes as the society approaches affluence and satisfaction.
4. Frugal way of life makes the human labor valuable thus restores human dignity.

Justice has many contextual meanings and social justice itself defies precise definition. The notion of justice changes according to the context in which one constructs the phenomenon. For the purpose of making the point of this argument clear, let us tentatively accept the premise that each person on the planet has an equal right to enjoy the benefits of nature and to live happily.

Presently, world energy consumption amounts to roughly 10 billion tons crude oil equivalent per year, which is about 1.5 tons of oil per person annually. However, actual per capita energy consumption amounts to more than 8 tons for each North American, around 4 tons for each resident of Japan and for each person living in the EU. But in China, each mainlander consumes only 0.7 tons and each person in India only 0.3 tons, respectively.

Although such inequalities are unjust, inequities between present and future generations may cause greater and more serious tribulation. And, because life spans are so brief, the people of future generations will have no recourse through which to seek compensation from the people of present generations for their deprivations.

Moreover, the present tendencies of globalization are accentuating the potential for these inequities between different generations. In a globalized society, the person or groups of persons whose exploitation of nature causes irrecoverable damage to nature are becoming increasingly difficult to identify. One reason for this is that many people are causing environmental damage in ignorance of what they are doing. In the globalized society, goods and services, notably food and energy, come from every corner of the world. The goods produced cheaply owing to modern technology's uncomplicated exploitation of nature are purchased without

consumers' cognizance of how these are made so easily available to them. It is natural for consumers to enjoy purchasing inexpensive goods or services. Irresponsibility prevails when people are ignorant of their culpability.

In feudal Japan, the situation was altogether different. When feudal lords were governing the prefectures under the national governance of the Shogun, there was a saying: "One tree, one head; one branch, one arm." If a villager cut down one tree for his own benefit without permission, he was obliged to compensate for it by having his head chopped, and if he cut a branch of a tree, he had to present his arm in exchange. For the feudal lords, the Daimyos, the greatest responsibility was to hand down their land to their sons, the next Daimyos, just as it was when they inherited it from their fathers, the previous Daimyos. Preservation of forests, the sources of timber for building and for fuel and so on, was imperative to enable their people including the samurais and peasants to survive.

Globalization is being advocated by many people for the reason that world wide production and consumption mean more goods supplied at much lower prices than otherwise. The availability of lower priced goods will reduce scarcity and realize global affluence supposedly bringing about happiness on a global scale. However, the most important point is not the reduction of scarcity via more supply. It is imperative that the world be aware that affluence is not synonymous with happiness.

To the contrary, affluence can destroy happiness. The words "affluent society" may sound to naïve ears as the goal to which everybody should aspire. But imagine if that dream comes true, what would people do after realizing this aspiration? It may sound strange but scarcity may be, as research suggests, indispensable to the feeling of happiness. This way of thinking is not new but not much considered today.

The economic theory of marginal utility is instructive in this regard. According to this supposition, the utility of any thing is the greatest when the supply of it is at the minimum. In the same manner, as the supply of goods approaches saturation, appreciation of the particular good diminishes accordingly. The same notion may be applied to the sentiment of happiness. One seeks satisfaction as the end for every act that one performs. However, the closer one comes to the point of satisfaction, the less the happiness gained in the pursuit. Thus, when complete satisfaction is achieved, marginal happiness has disappeared. When one is with nothing more to do, one should normally feel uneasy and unhappy.

In summary, the injustices committed to future generations have to be given more attention as an issue of social justice. Nature that should be handed over to future generations is being over exploited for the sake of the material affluence of certain members of contemporary generations. This is a vain and mistaken goal in itself. The manifestation of this injustice, the irreversible degradation of nature, is the foundation of inter-generational injustice. Its cause is humankind's present obsession with the idea that affluence is imperative for the attainment of equity and happiness in contemporary society. However, people who seek satisfaction in material affluence may lose happiness and human dignity as they gain their

objective. Not only do they suffer but they cause greater tribulation for future generations. Therefore, scarcity should be respected and valued: frugality has its rewards in happy and dignified lives.

References

What if my gold be wrapped up in ore? ---Pilgrims Progress

The following references can be found at the address:

<http://www.enekan.jp/>

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