Critical Thinking and Resilience: Some Possibilities of American Thought

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AFTER FUKUSHIMA

The phrase, "Anshin-Anzen" ("Security-Safety") has entered into popular discourse in Japanese society, especially after the Fukushima Nuclear Plant incident on March 11, 2011, which was triggered by an earthquake. It has spread from being a slogan of local municipal government, to being adopted as a principle for the food industry. Risk consciousness has increased. Conversely, the quest for the prevention of risk in order to achieve the highest possible security has been reinforced. "Anshin-Anzen" is a term that circulates, symbolizing and reinforcing this tendency. Furthermore, under the pressure of a globalized economy, the vocabulary of "risk" permeates the field of education: we hear of "academic risk," "risk audit," and "risk management." In more strictly philosophical terms, the mind-set of risk management is tied up with the quest for certainty. Hence, risk is something negative, something to be managed: security is to be increased in accordance to safety measures. Junichi Murata, in the field of the ethics of technology, argues that we must retain a "healthy fear of failure." In the aftermath of the Fukushima incident, Murata reminds us that once we learn to live with a "healthy fear of failure," we shall no longer accept a priori the combination of Anshin and Anzen;² rather we should live and think in uncertainty. Murata proposes the cultivation of a kind of "civic virtue" that calls for the positive commitment of the responsible and critical citizen and also makes possible a sense of "shared responsibility" in a community.

When we think, however, about how to resuscitate the power of recovery from absolute loss and disaster, from within a state of bottomless despair, we need to rethink the meaning of "responsible citizen" and of a "critical public," and, more generally, "critical thinking" if these notions are to guide us in living through uncertainty. This will necessarily involve us in an educational quest concerning the cultivation of a kind of critical thinking that is inseparable from recovery — in, for instance, citizenship education or philosophy for children. With regard to such an orientation, I shall explore the antifoundationalist thinking of American philosophy, running from Ralph Waldo Emerson to John Dewey, and then to Stanley Cavell. First, in response to the challenges of the risk society that are presented by Ulrich Beck, I shall discuss Dewey's pragmatism, centering on the convergence of chance and crisis with critical thinking. Second, in order to test its viability and to step back further to examine its preconditions, I shall reexamine Cavell's philosophy of morning — where critical thinking is inseparable from *criticality*, figured as a crisis of rebirth. In conclusion, I shall present the idea of resilience as a window through which to reconsider the education of critical thinking.

CRITICAL THINKING RECONSIDERED IN THE RISK SOCIETY: FROM BECK TO DEWEY ULRICH BECK — THE DYSTOPIA OF THE RISK SOCIETY

We might wonder why we have to begin with the idea of "risk" and why we cannot simply live within a cozy zone of security. It is Ulrich Beck who makes us realize why we are necessarily involved in risks today. His Risk Society provides us with a sense of the dystopia of postmodern and postindustrial society.³ We do not simply live today in a "wealth-distributing" society: it is also a "risk-distributing" society (RS, 20). The risks that postmodern society faces are not personal risks and their ramifications are global. Ironically, this global effect drives the world toward a utopian way of thinking that undermines national and economic borders (RS, 47). It brings about a complicated and inseparable relationship between scientific rationality and social rationality. Under these circumstances risk management and minimization do not guarantee security. The risk society destabilizes the boundary between scientific "experts and non-experts," involving a complicated compromising of the relationship between scientific rationality and social rationality (RS, 57). Scientific questions become inseparable from the question of "How we want to live" (RS, 58). Furthermore the center of "risk consciousness" lies "in the future" (RS, 34), that is to say, in what is yet to be, and hence, what is invisible here and now. Indeed, the social impetus of risk involves fear of what is not present yet: oftentimes risks are unpredictable, while at the same time, invisible and pervasive. This is thoroughly oriented by negativity: "We are concerned with the absolute and unlimited NOT, which threatens us here, the *un- in general*, unimaginable, unthinkable, un-, un-, un-" (RS, 52). Beck describes this aspect of the risk society as "solidarity motivated by anxiety" (RS, 49), whose "normative counter-project" is "safety," and whose orientation is characterized by the statement, "I am afraid!" (RS, 49.). This means that the risk society geared toward safety is by nature "negative and defensive": its aim is to prevent the worst (RS, 49).

Beck's sociological analysis incorporates philosophical and ethical observations concerning the question, "What is humankind?" (RS, 28). In response he proposes to resuscitate the power of self-criticism from within science, and this through an interdisciplinary approach (RS, 158, 160, 178–79). This means that a new type of autonomous subject must be conceived, not only amongst the scientific community, but also on the part of the public — a subject who can be engaged in critical judgment about the use and application of science (RS, 172). Such a subject will then be committed to a "self-critical society" in which the criteria of judgment are constantly to be tested and revised in response to "the threats of the future" (RS, 176). Beck points to an "essential mission of pedagogical institutions" (RS, 76): new abilities need to be cultivated — "the ability to anticipate and endure dangers, to deal with them biographically and politically" and the ability to "handle ascribed outcomes of danger and the fears and insecurities residing in them" (RS, 76). Beck points us to the necessity of alternative thinking — to an antifoundationalist thinking that allows us to live through uncertainty, beyond the mentality of "managing" risks. The haunting thought with which his account leaves us, however, is of the dystopia of the risk society that confronts us, driven by negativity, "solidarity motivated by anxiety" (RS, 49).

JOHN DEWEY — TAKING A FURTHER RISK WITH PRAGMATISM

It is the American philosopher, John Dewey, who — while sharing with Beck a commitment to cultivating a critical public through a pedagogy of critical thinking that destabilizes the quest for certainty, and disturbs the scheme of the foundationalist thinking of *Anshin-Anzen* — shows us a way beyond this dystopia.

Dewey is an American philosopher who, already in the early twentieth century, predicted that the quest for certainty could not exist without uncertainty, just as security could not exist without anxiety. His idea is still relevant in the risk society. Murata refers to Dewey's pragmatism as it fully accommodates uncertainty and adopts an inquiry-oriented approach. Dewey's pragmatism presents us with the idea of *security without foundation* — a way of thinking and living in the quest for stability and safety but without relying on any fixed ground. It is thoroughly *antifoundationalist*: it refuses to lay claim to any permanent ground upon which to rely in the making of judgments. In the "democratization of inquiry," and through social intelligence, the criteria of judgments should be continuously discussed, searched, and revised in public discussion. This directs us to an alternative mode of human reason that deals flexibly with the changeable, the accidental, and the unexpected.

Dewey's pragmatism helps us elucidate risk as the metaphysical condition of the world and human nature. In *Experience and Nature* (1925), he discusses the "generic traits of existence" or the "metaphysics of nature" — namely, the comprehensive nature of the existential world. The world of empirical things, Dewey says, is "fundamentally hazardous" (*EN*, 45)-the "world is precarious and perilous" (*EN*, 44). Precisely because of this generic trait, "fear" is a "function of the environment" (*EN*, 43). The source of our "happiness" is derived from "happenings" (*EN*, 45): and etymologically "hap-" means chance, and happiness originally implies something more like luck. Because of this uncertain nature of existence, and in order to mitigate the instability of life, human beings have been in search of "stability" and "assurance." It is this very "precarious nature of existence," Dewey says, that is a condition of the ideal, the regular, and the assured (*EN*, 58).

Dewey's metaphysics of nature implies that we should reconsider how we think in order to live not only through but also *beyond* the risk society. The real power of thinking is tested at the very moment when human beings encounter uncertainty, while at the same time the nature of uncertainty and indeterminateness is disclosed in the process of thinking. Risk taking *is* the condition of thinking: in his words, "Act, but act at your peril." By contrast, the mentality of "safety first" puts an emphasis on pure thinking and knowledge over making and doing (QC, 6). True happiness, Dewey suggests, is to be attained by accepting the risks in action: the quest for certainty, in "schemes of insurance" (QC, 8), is "a quest for a peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear which action cast" (QC, 7). Dewey's antifoundationalist pragmatism helps us reconsider the ways we live in the risk society, without relying on the foundationalist view of "Anshin-Anzen." This requires us to persevere constantly in the process of converting instability toward stability, to move from uncertainty to certainty. The critical and intelligent public formed in this way is an essential condition for creating democracy as a way of life.

TAKING A FURTHER STEP — OR A STEP BACK

Deweyan critical thinking is still relevant today, and hence Dewey's critical thinking needs to be reexamined. Let us consider an instance. After the 3.11 earthquake in Japan, Michael Sandel raised the possibility of a global citizenry beyond national and cultural borders, of a global community constituted through sympathy — the capacity to share others' pain as one's own. As crucial factors to enhance such global awareness, he emphasizes the significance of open dialogue with others and offers a vision of thinking that includes both reason and sympathetic understanding. Similarly in philosophy for children, a Deweyan type of critical thinking and collaborative inquiry has been called for. These are qualities needed in citizenship education. The cultivation of a critical public is definitely needed in post-Fukushima Japanese society, especially to reexamine the risks the nuclear plant accident has disclosed.

A documentary film, *No Man's Zone: Fukushima — The Day After*, ¹⁰ however, forces us to rethink the prevalent discourse of critical thinking and collaborative inquiry. The forbidding silence projected, the lack of sound, evokes a horizon of life beyond accountability, transparency, and articulation through reason, and leads with the images of debris and destruction toward invisible fears, toward what cannot be said. When asked by a reporter, "What do you think?" a man who has lost his means of life and his home answers: "I do not know what to do." Another says: "We are falling apart." Others, many others, say that they never thought that such degree of disaster would hit them. Even after we acquire "civic virtues" and satisfy our responsibilities as "responsible citizens," the unpredictable and uncertain nature of risk invites us to think further, beyond "shared responsibility." When we think about how to resuscitate the power of recovery from the debris and destruction, the critical discourse of deliberative democracy leaves us with a further question: *Have we satisfied our responsibilities if we can cope with the problems of the Fukushima incident?* It asks us to step back and reconsider the precondition of critical thinking.

CAVELL AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MORNING: CRISIS, CRITICALITY, AND CRITICAL THINKING

One of the men in the film, on being asked what he will do from now on, answers: "We shall repair as much as we can." What would be a vision of critical thinking that can respond to this silent despair, to its faint hope for recovery? While furthering a promising line of American philosophy's antifoundationalism, Stanley Cavell responds to this question, going beyond the bounds of Deweyan critical thinking, by reinforcing a link between crisis and the critical, from a *clinical* perspective. Cavell insists on the distance between Emerson's and Henry David Thoreau's transcendentalism from Dewey's pragmatism. Cavell is attuned to the insistence in Emerson's remark that "There is no middle way between, say, self-reliance and self-(or other) conformity. This points to a kind of dynamic oscillation, to a movement that never allows us to settle down, and hence acknowledges, perhaps broaches more directly, our deeper anxiety. In order for Dewey, and for us, to be able to exercise the radical power of critical thinking, so that we can convert the dystopia of risk into *crisis*, and despair into hope, a more radical power of transcendence is called for. Reinterpreting Thoreau's pondering of morning and mourning in *Walden*, Cavell calls this recov-

ery and conversion "the morning of mourning, the dawning of grieving." ¹⁴ He casts Thoreau as the philosopher of morning, of a morning that is ever still to be arrived at and, hence, never fully to be achieved. ¹⁵

It is in this process-oriented perfectionism of Emerson and Thoreau via Cavell that we can find a further clue to reconsidering critical thinking as inseparable from crisis. Discussing the "phenomenological coincidences" between Cavell and Emmanuel Levinas, 16 Paul Standish finds in their work an alternative idea of critical thinking, in which the "criticality of the human being" is its precondition. ¹⁷ Referring to John Llewelyn's interpretation of Levinas, Standish suggests a dimension of critical thinking where imagination operates "at a level below the critical — that is, below the level of assertion and deliberation." ¹⁸ Indeed Cavell's reconfiguration of thinking allows us to conceive of critical thinking as inseparable from crisis and recovery. In comparison to the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida and Levinas, Cavell takes philosophy back to the ordinary via Emerson and Thoreau: philosophy becomes "a clinical problem as much as a critical one"19 — "clinical" here in the sense that philosophy begins in the street and that philosophy causes wonder and transformation. This is transcendence in the ordinary. And it is this triangular relationship between crisis, the critical, and the clinical that constitutes Cavell's philosophy of morning. The focus in his idea of crisis is on the very moment of realizing risk as crisis, crisis as a chance to *change*. There is a poignant sense of a threshold being crossed.

In Cavell's philosophy of crisis, such change (call it self-transcendence) is a matter neither of spiritual nor of natural change: it is rather a distinctively human crisis.²⁰ Cavell says that the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau is underwritten by ordinary language philosophy (and, by implication, that language plays a crucial role in transcendence).²¹ It is in their alertness to the performative aspect of language to the way that to say something is to do something — that conversion takes place. Standish also says of Cavell's idea of language that "there is something projective about language because the rule-following of language does not finally determine future usage but is always open to new development."²² It is this risk-taking language that is at the heart of Cavell's and Thoreau's antifoundationalism. This is language that enables us to take a risk, to leap toward uncertainty. Risk here is not a risk that is subject to management. Neither is it restricted to such matters as the gap between poor and rich; Thoreau speaks to those who are in "moderate circumstances." The clinical question Cavell addresses is how we can recover our own voice from within loss and uncertainty,²⁴ and his answer is paradoxical: "power seems to be the result of rising, not the cause."25

Cavell's search for continuing (and discontinuing) rebirth, for democracy still to come, is driven by the sense of sin to the society — responsibility as a matter of responsiveness to the other that is never fully satisfied.²⁶The kind of "change" that is envisioned in Cavell's philosophy of crisis and rebirth is not that of visible, immediate change in the process of the solving of problems. Standing on the boundary between the possible and impossible,²⁷ it is a more radical change, even as it is invisible and indirect. "Conversion is a turning of our natural reactions; so it is symbolized as rebirth." Cavell's philosophy of morning makes us reconsider the criticality of

critical thinking — in response to the "silent melancholy"²⁹ (Emerson) and "quiet desperation"³⁰ (Thoreau) of those who have lost their way.

RESILIENCE: EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL THINKING RECONSIDERED

In order to live not only through but also *beyond* the risk society, how, in the light of the antifoundationalism of American philosophy from Dewey to Cavell, might an alternative route for the education of critical thinking be elucidated? In contrast to Dewey's forward-looking idea of critical thinking, Cavell turns us back to preconditions: it is out of the sense of shame and sin, the state of loss, of depression, that "morning" is to be celebrated. Cavell's Emersonian "onward thinking" puts a sharper focus on the critical moment of conversion, on the "threshold" and the "crossroads." It is this radical and dynamic shift in thought that is a key to our recovery from disaster and loss — not a return to an original state, but a movement toward something new, from darkness to light. 32

The radicality of Cavellian critical thinking for recovery can be reevaluated from the framework of *resilience*. "Resilience" is an idea that has recently captured attention in various fields — biology, ecology, medicine, engineering, business, and psychology. According to Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy, resilience is not "robustness" or "redundancy." After we go through the "critical threshold" of change, we can never be the same but enter a "new normal" (*RES*, 7). Resilient systems and people are subject to failure (*RES*, 13) and to the messiness of the world (*RES*, 14). Their discussion of resilience, however, discloses a certain limit when it comes to people, to individuals. They associate resilience on an individual level with "habits of mind" (*RES*, 14), with our "innate characteristics" (*RES*, 122), or with "personal traits" (*RES*, 127), which they claim can be cultivated and changed (*Resilience*, 14). Also with regard to how we cultivate "personal resilience," they refer to psychology and genetics, even to Buddhist meditation (*RES*, 137), while "social resilience" is said to relate to the communal power of "cooperation and trust" (*RES*, 143). It lacks the subtleties of human existence.

Cavell's philosophy of morning sheds new light on resilience. As Michel de Montaigne suggests, invoking the idea of a Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*, resilience can be associated with the attitude of taking things in one's stride. In Friedrich Nietzsche, the idea of Eternal Return is that you will never look at your life with *ressentiment*: that you would, in principle, will to live this moment again (even when it is bad). This is all very good, but it is tainted with the disdain and anger that runs through so much of Nietzsche, and it needs a sharper focus.

Here we can turn to Emerson who is the original source of Cavellian resilience. Emerson's image of resilience is informed by hope, by leaving and departure. And thus, through the power of thinking,

A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think ... This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs. Let the beauty of affection cheer his lowly roof.³⁴

Life is a source of thinking, and thinking that takes place in life is fundamentally receptive. It is a kind of thinking that is different from thinking that categorizes, judges, divides. Also being different from "social capital" (the relationship between people,

communal power, and so forth) as a source of resilience, ³⁵ thinking here is a responsibility that is assigned to each of us. This is what Emerson calls "Man Thinking." ³⁶ Emerson seeks to portray a kind of self-assured subject, but this is fundamentally different from the image of the self-confident, self-assertive American individual, or from the rational autonomous subject in modern Western philosophy. This is a risk-taking self as opposed to an insured self. Such self-assurance is not self-centered, but rather is open to what happens, to chance and contingency: the self abandons itself. ³⁷ Emerson indicates an alternative human subject — a subject exercising its power of recovery in response to what life calls for, in response to suffering, and this through the power of thinking. This is an alternative critical thinking that is called for in the risk society — critical thinking that is preconditioned by resilience, the power to recover from crisis in life.

Such self-abandonment, however, cannot simply rely on Buddhist meditation or on a natural and communal power of recovery. Resilience in Cavell has to do with one's reengagement with language. It is this aspect of language that distinguishes human crisis from natural crisis, and, hence, human resilience from natural resilience. Resilience is exercised and manifested in the moment of conversion, in a kind of metamorphosis. Unlike Heideggerian "resoluteness," and different from any therapeutic benefit understood in terms of Deleuze's rhizomatics, this Cavellian resilient self has a sharp focus on the moment of turn in negativity to affirmation. This is transcendence forward — transcendence through the performative of a language that takes risks, through the projective nature of language. It can be captured by Cavell's expression that he mentions in reference to the learning of language by a child: "If [a child] had never made such leaps [in her use of the word] she would never have walked into speech. Having made it, meadows of communication can grow for us."38 This resounds with Thoreau's remark: "I desire to speak somewhere without bounds ... In view of the future or possible, we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side."39 Thinking can convert fate to power, "the suffering of the necessity of action." ⁴⁰ In fact the occasion for resilience is there already in the language we use — there not just as an optional extra but in the very responsibility that resides in our speaking. To take up this responsibility is always to risk the rebuff, to risk being misunderstood, being rejected or dismissed. But to fail to do this is to deny the very possibility of oneself.

If this is so, then resilience does not seem to be the kind of thing that we can systematically "cultivate": we cannot create a program with resilience as its goal. If we push this line further, then critical thinking understood in terms of resilience and the power of recovery is not something to be taught as a method or thinking skill. Neither can it be encapsulated as a moral virtue, or in terms of character traits or habits of mind; it is rather the radical reconfiguration of human intelligence as a whole, in a way that is attuned to its passion and passivity. Living in this way beyond the risk society, raising ourselves from quiet desperation, raising ourselves to suffer, is the only way to celebrate what Emerson calls the "happy hour." And this requires patient, daily reinvestment in language, which is at the heart of the education of critical thinking. This is a kind of education that sensitizes us to the possibilities

of risk-taking language through the use of which we exercise our resilience. It will allow us to challenge the prevailing discourse of the containment of risk in teaching and learning, policy making and curriculum development, while at the same time exceeding the limits of the existing discourse of education for critical thinking. It will open us to a more risky exercise of judgment, and hence, guide us to a more richer and more responsive possibility of living. This is the wisdom that is bequeathed by American thought — the call to take a chance precisely because life is uncertain, which is the very source of human freedom. Rather than evading "social" "change," this is education for "criticism of democracy from within";⁴¹ it is for us to acquire, from within "the inmost," the strongest possible power of recovery, to say from within silent melancholy, "We shall repair as much as we can."

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- 17. Ibid., 84.
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- 20. Stanley Cavell, The Senses of Walden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43.
- 21. Cavell, Themes Out of School, 32.

- 22. Standish, "Education for Grown-ups," 85 (emphasis added).
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- 29. See Cavell, Emerson's Transcendental Etudes, 252n12.
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- 32. Ibid., 102.
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