

HOMO CONTRIBUENS
THE NEED TO GIVE AND THE SEARCH FOR FULFILMENT

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Hisao Taki



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By Hisao Taki

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FOREWORD

By

IKUO HIRAYAMA*



It is my great pleasure to contribute to this publication of the English edition of *Koken suru Kimochi (Homo Contribuens)*, originally written in Japanese by my longstanding friend Hisao Taki, a graduate of the School of Engineering, Tokyo Institute of Technology. Taki heads a number of successful transit-advertising and IT-related enterprises. Among his achievements is the creation of the restaurant search site Gourmet Navigator Inc. This company, founded more than a decade ago, expanded rapidly and in May 2005 was listed on the stock exchange.

Taki has long been engaged in a wide variety of cultural activities contributing to the enrichment of society. He has used his status as a successful entrepreneur to provide scholarships for students at art schools overseas and school expenses for children orphaned by traffic accidents. He serves on the board of directors of the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research of

* Japanese-style painter. He is former president of the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, chairman of the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research, president of the Japan Institute of Fine Arts, adviser to the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, and chairman of the Japan-China Friendship Association, among other posts. His many honours include the Order of Cultural Merit of the Japanese government (1998) and the Légion d'Honneur of the French government (1995).

Foreword

which I chair. Even this brief profile does not do full justice to Taki's diverse commitments. In addition to his involvement in business and social activities, he is deeply immersed in philosophy.

The essence of Taki's philosophy is that man's aspiration to do something for others and contribute to society arises, not merely from a sense of duty or a need for self-sacrifice, but from an inborn and intuitive urge.

Koken suru Kimochi is cited in Japan's authoritative encyclopaedia of philosophy and ethics, *Gendai Rinrigaku Jiten* (Kobundo, 2006). In this sense, *Homo Contribuens* – man the contributor – the term Taki coined and explores in this book – is becoming part of accepted parlance in the field of philosophy and ethics education. At the Tohoku University of Community Service and Science, *Koken suru Kimochi* is used as a class text and an excerpt from the book was also used in the testing of reading comprehension in a university entrance examination.

The *Homo Contribuens* Research Institute was founded in 2003. Led by eminent scholars such as Hisatake Kato, professor emeritus of Kyoto University (former president of the Philosophical Association of Japan), Masuo Aizawa, president of the Tokyo Institute of Technology (specialist in life science and technology) and Yasuaki Nara, former chancellor of Komazawa University (scholar of Buddhism), the institute's activities recently entered their fourth year. I, in accord with these scholars, am a firm supporter of the views posited in this book.

Taki's philosophy and ideas about the human urge to contribute have received widespread acceptance. Shoji Sumita, principal executive adviser of the East Japan Railway Company, praised the work as 'a textbook of ethics and philosophy for our times', describing Taki's propositions as a philosophy that 'elucidates how working for others or contributing to society is ultimately a practical way of doing something for oneself'. I agree, and we are imbued with a sense of fulfilment and peace of mind through contributing to the welfare of others. In the course of

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expressing the urge to contribute horizons are widened and the future enhanced.

One of the reports submitted in the seminars of the Homo Contribuens Research Institute introduced the experience of Hiroshi Tomita, executive director of a non-profit organization called the Japan Alliance for Humanitarian Mine Clearance Support. Needless to say, mine clearance is a high-risk occupation, and Tomita initially experienced great fear, physically and psychologically, while working as a volunteer in mine clearance operations in Cambodia and other parts of Asia. He happened to see an advertisement for *Koken suru kimochi*, and subsequently purchased it. Reading Taki's book led Tomita to the realization that his voluntary mine clearance work was a self-serving undertaking and this revelation alleviated all his feelings of worry and fear.

As Taki explains in this book, human beings are referred to as *Homo sapiens* ('man the reasoner') in biology, but also *Homo faber* ('man the maker'), the former focusing on man's capacity to think and learn and the latter on man's ability to produce things. He argues, however, that above all human beings are *Homo contribuens* ('man the contributor') who, by their nature, are impelled to contribute to a better world.

I, too, am among those who seek to contribute to society, and as a painter I have engaged in the international activities of such organizations as the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research and UNESCO. When I heard of the pending publication of the English edition of Taki's book, I was eager to add my voice in recommending it to readers. The book illuminates the intuitive urge to contribute, an urge that lies dormant within us but of which we are often unaware.

The English edition was prepared by Hiroko Taki, specialist in the works of nineteenth-century English novelist Charles Dickens and wife of Hisao Taki.

April 2007

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Unlike most highly regarded books by authors who are also men of business, *Homo Contribuens* is unique in tracing industrialist Hisao Taki's personal journey of philosophical and ethical development. The reader is asked to return with him to his lifelong quest: Is the Urge to Contribute an instinct rooted in the human heart? And if so to what extent can we activate this urge?

In his examination of the Japanese or Asian way of thinking, 'mono no aware' (literally the pathos of things) and 'being enabled to live' by the grace and effort of others, Hisao Taki convinces us that the urge to contribute is a basic and universal instinct which enables us to find the way towards a healthy and happy personal life leading to a comfortable and enriched society. He also exemplifies good practice of the urge to contribute in his own business successes, fusing Japanese dining culture with information technology as well as weaving art and information technology into traffic culture. It is fascinating that his business methods have embraced the aim of serving others and contributing to society.

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This is a stimulating read about how we think and how we solve seemingly impossible problems of corporate, social and personal life by exercising the instinctive urge to contribute.

Masuo Aizawa
President, Tokyo Institute of Technology
Executive Member, Council for Science and Technology Policy
Cabinet Office, Japan

P R E F A C E



In a relentlessly complex world, societies and lifestyles are perpetually changing. Even the limited constellation of elements that impinges on any individual life teems with diversity and continually revolves around us, opaque and perplexing. Many people feel an indefinable deficiency in coming to terms with today's world, which could perhaps be alleviated by divining an immutable essence of human nature through which we could gain an understanding of the world and our place in it. Yet even while we recognize the need for a new philosophy, we are reluctant to embark on a serious intellectual quest for solutions as past experience has shown that both personal and social lives remain less complicated when unencumbered by searching questions. To immerse ourselves in a labyrinth of philosophical contemplation is indeed a risk, but while it may be possible to avoid life's important questions by suspending thought, a certain disquiet tells us that something is lacking in the way we live and in our relations with others. Perhaps we see no clear direction for ourselves, feeling a lack of centredness in our existence, and in the absence of some kind of inspiration it is very difficult to rise above this slough of uncertainty.

There is a way of thinking, however, that clarifies and helps to resolve some of the complex yet crucial questions in our lives; its

nucleus is the belief that people are born with an altruistic instinct, a compulsion to do something for the world, an urge to contribute to society.

In geometry, sometimes an auxiliary line is drawn as an aid to solving a problem. The urge to contribute can be perceived as a kind of ‘auxiliary line’ that helps us live fuller lives in today’s world. It is a perception that can serve as a signpost showing us what course in life to take when we are irresolute. At the same time it can serve as a central indicator helping to guide society as a whole.

If we recognize the urge to contribute as a universal, basic instinct, such an understanding can reveal the way to achieve healthy and happy lives for individuals, as well as a more content and enriched society benefitting from a range of salutary effects. In simple terms, the contributing instinct could, for example, help control teasing and bullying among children, or crime and delinquency among teenagers, and in adults incidents of uncontrolled rage, or the deadly activities of subversive cults like Aum Shinrikyo.

How, you may ask, could the ‘urge to contribute’ have such a positive effect on our lives? What difference does it make whether we understand an altruistic spirit as an instinctive urge or an obligation dictated by culture and society? The conventional view of people who make efforts to contribute to the well-being of others is to classify them as virtuous and socially responsible, qualities that are taught and learned. If, on the other hand, we recognize the desire to help, to give, *to contribute* as a natural human instinct, we see that acting in the interest of others is neither exceptional nor worthy of special praise. It is no more or less than hunger, sexual appetite, or any other natural urge. It is inherent in our makeup, neither bad nor good but indisputable. What is important is to recognize that we all have an inner need to make ourselves useful, and that need is an innate, natural force in being human. That recognition promotes a whole new outlook on life; a new philosophy begins to take shape.

Preface

The fusion of the two seemingly unrelated concepts, the urge to contribute and natural instinct, gives rise to an intellectual force that allows a new way of thinking and gives a fresh perspective on human beings, society and corporate activities. Coincidentally, the principles underlying the new concept can be a catalyst that invigorates individual life at home, at work and social life in all its aspects.

The term instinct as used in psychology usually refers to inborn urges and desires towards typical patterns of behaviour. Instincts are understood as responses or inclinations, sometimes subconscious, that are genetically programmed, not as aspects of intellect acquired through training and education. The influential American psychologist A. H. Maslow (1908–70), for example, posited that instinct-driven human desires are basic physiological responses controlling our most primitive urges.

Just as commonly, to contribute something to the world is regarded as a means to realize the noblest aspects of human intellect. From this point of view, it is an aspect of human nature that arises from a spiritually elevated, purposeful desire for self-sacrifice, and it becomes assertive when we consciously direct feelings of love and concern outwards, towards the people, society, culture or environment that surround us.

What I propose here, however, is to consider the urge to serve others as something instilled in us by nature, deriving not from the intellect but from instinct and expressed naturally. I see it, in other words, as an innate (*a priori*) drive rather than a learned (*a posteriori*) response.

This hypothesis points towards a new understanding of human beings. My term for this new conception humans is *Homo contribuens*, which I will discuss more fully in the section in Chapter 2 entitled “The Fifth “Life Mode””. To summarize my argument, the urge to contribute is given expression in the same way as our physiological urges for food or sex. Arising spontaneously, it is not motivated by any moral consciousness or sense of virtue, but

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stands among the other natural urges we strive to gratify in order to attain health, normality and balance.

Three major elements that figure in my concept of *Homo contribuens* are the self, the other and contemporary society as constituted by the self and the other. Chapter 1 begins with an event that ignited my lifelong engagement in philosophical inquiry. Drawing connections between that personal experience and the development of classical Greek philosophy, I show how the principles that underlie the urge to contribute were recognized even by ancient Greek minds. In Chapter 2, I present the new perspective that emerges when we acknowledge the urge to contribute as an instinct, and I show how this approach can be applied to one's own life. In the remaining chapters I take this perspective, with liberal use of familiar examples, to analyse the self, the other and contemporary society in order to accomplish a twofold objective: to identify in broad terms where our era is headed, and to sketch a new vision of humanity, society in general and corporate life.

Hisao Taki
Karuizawa
Summer 2000

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