

Tsukahara Yujin

There is a great deal of difference between still believing something and again believing something. G. C. Lichtenberg

There seems to be many 'shakes' that attack our beliefs. What should we do to after such 'shakes'? Still believing something, or again believing it? In this essay, I'm going to examine about the concept of 'understanding' something first. After that, I will think about 'believing' something with respect to 'understanding' it. On the basis of these arguments, I will go on to think about what happens when the 'shake', then I will conclude that what we should do after having attacked by the 'shake'.

1. What is: 'understanding' something?

The concept of believing something seems somewhat similar to understanding it, even though there is a sheer difference between them. The thing is, however, the problem of understanding is easier to comprehend, because it provides us more concrete examples based on our daily lives. That is why I think it's better to examine about understanding something, before starting our discussions about believing something. In this chapter, I would like to clarify the characteristics of the concept of understanding something through two familiar examples, so that we can grasp the idea of believing something in the following chapter.

One example is when you try to understand your friends. Being a friend, you may think that you know quite a lot about your friend. Indeed, you must have spent quite a very long time together, and you may know that things like what he feels or how he will react in some situations. But it is not that you understand him. He might behave like a totally different person in front of his family or his childhood friends; he might keep a secret that he cannot tell you; and even more likely, you might have just misunderstood him for some reason. Another aspect of the problem is that he, your friend himself, might not be sure about his personality. How can others understand him when, even the very person is not sure? In brief, you cannot understand a person even if he were your best friend. Only thing you do instead is to guess his personality.

The other example is investigations in the world of science. In most fields of science, the first step should be observation of nature and its phenomena. Then the scientists would analyze the resulting data of their observation, can build a model that can explain the result. This is the process called induction in philosophy. The point is that even scientists, who seem to understand the world most accurately, need to reason the

truth in their process of building models. The models, which are revised in the course of further observation, are thought to be accurate, yet they aren't completely so. Ultimately, it ends up being a mere product of reasoning, which cannot be hundred percent accurate.

According to these two examples, we can conclude that we cannot be hundred percent accurate about something. In other words, we cannot understand something.

Before going on to the next argument, I would like to point out another aspect of understanding. As the examples above, we are always *eager* to understand. In the case of friendship, we want to know about our friends because we like them. In the case of science, we (or at least scientists) are curious about the mysteries of the world. This desire to understand will play an important role later in this essay.

2. What is: 'believing' something?

In last chapter, we found that it is impossible to completely understand something, because we have to, more or less, guess. However, in our daily lives, we all pretend to understand things – no one on the street is frightened with the questions like; *why there is something, instead of nothing?* People just walk as if they understood everything. They might not pretend, at least on this stage; they might not notice that they don't understand things.

With this respect, I suppose, the concept of believing something should be divided into the following types:

(A) To believe something, based on (imaginary) understanding.

(B) To believe something, not based on understanding.

In the case of (A), people believe it, because they think it is true. We believe that everyone dies, because we grant it as a law in nature, observing the death of millions of people (even though it is not proved to be the truth). In the case of (B), on the other hand, people believe it because of circumstances like communities; otherwise, they don't believe something that they even don't understand. Suppose you believed in the safety of nuclear power plants in 2000s. It is very unlikely that you understood quite a lot about nuclear power such as mechanism of the plant, so if you believed in the safety myth, you must have believed it because of social circumstances.

3. What happens when the 'shake' attacked you?

As I have wrote in the introduction, there are some shakes, attacking your belief. (I used the word 'shake' to refer to the attack on what you believe in this essay.) Before answering the key question in this essay: what we should do after having 'shake', I

think it is a good idea to examine the characteristics of ‘shakes’, in both cases of (A) and (B).

In the case of (A), when you believe something, based on (imaginary) understanding, the shake is caused by the fact that you find yourself not understanding the very thing you’ve believed. When people find that they didn’t *really* understand the matter, it is very difficult to keep on believing it. For instance,

In the case of (B), on the other hand, the ‘shake’ should be caused by criticism of someone. Please recall of the example of nuclear power in 2000s. If someone criticized you then with competing evidence, your belief would be shaken and you would notice that you didn’t understand it, but just believed blindly.

In either case, it is something very painful. As I have pointed out in the former chapters, humans have desires to understand things. This desire has been satisfied by not knowing the fact that we don’t really understand things. But in this moment, when the shake comes over, you find that you didn’t really understand. What should we do after going through this ‘shake’?

4. What should we do after going through the ‘shake’?

In this part of the essay, my argument comes back to the topic. Let’s think about what happens after the ‘shake’.

The most important point is that people cannot live without believing something. To believe something is to cling to it. How people will react after the shake is therefore clear: they will try to return to the state they had before.

More concretely, in the case of (A), people would pretend as if they understand everything just in the way they used to do. This is because their belief was based on (imaginary) understanding of things. Although their ground of belief was vanished by the shake, people cannot bear the state of understanding nothing, because of the human desire to understand. What they would do is, accordingly, to pretend that they understand every important thing in life. This is equivalent to what the state that people are *again* believing something.

In the case of (B), however, they would keep on believing what they used to believe blindly; otherwise, they will lose the ground of their life. In other words, what they will do is to ignore the fact that they didn’t really understand. Such attitude should be equivalent to the one who is *still* believing something.

These are the possible answers to the question, but it seems that they are not very enough. In the last chapter, I will suggest the third answer to the question.

5. Conclusion

In the first part of my essay, I pointed out that it is never possible to understand something to the full, because the only way to do so is to guess or reason what seems to be truth. There are two types of believing, but in either way, we found there might be some shakes that we cannot bear. What we do instead is to believe again by pretending that we understand things or still continue to believe it blindly.

In either way, however, there's not so much rationality about it. It makes no sense to pretend to understand, not to believe something blindly. That is because both of them give up understanding the truth. What is important here is, however, not to give up understanding it. Even though it is very difficult, we can further our understandings by continue reasoning. My answer to the question: What should we do to after such 'shakes'? is, to keep on challenging.