

The Association of Synthetic Anthropology

About this Association

This Association started out as Research Group of Synthetic Anthropology. Since then the Association of Synthetic Anthropology has been pursuing the following question: what does it mean to be human?

Summary of the Association's Activities

With the purpose of deepening and spreading the research of the Association of Synthetic Anthropology, we organize the following projects:

1. Organizing the General Meeting (yearly)
2. Publishing the Journal and editing the books of the Association
3. Organizing discussion groups (four times a year in Kanto, once a year in Kansai)
4. Publishing the newsletter
5. Opening different sectional meetings (sectional meeting of young members, etc.)
6. Cooperation and solidarity with other organizations
7. Other necessary business

The reason for establishing the Association of Synthetic Anthropology

For more than thirty years, we have been pursuing anthropological research, considering contemporary issues of Japanese society. We feel that the time has come to create both new science and wisdom and a space for a symposia attended by the leading scientists of every academic field. We explain the following reasons and at the same time we are calling all those who share similar interests to join us.

Preparatory committee concerning the creation of the Association of Synthetic Anthropology – February 2006

Main text (Purpose)

While today's society is preoccupied with advancing its material civilization, it neglects to consider where we should be heading. This has led to a sense of aimless wandering in a chaos of our own making. We live in a world in which every state just follows its own national interests, ignoring the wider interests of mankind; individuals simply chase after immediate profit; and money-mania becomes ever more widespread. As a result, mankind is digging its own grave through the destruction of its ecosystems, the key to our survival. Furthermore, we produce weapons of mass destruction, wage war and butcher one another on a scale unseen in any other living creature.

What's more, today's society uses fast-growing biotechnology, genetic engineering – the “territory of god” – and is moving towards the cloning of human beings. In many ways today's society, whilst directing the rapid development of information systems and enjoying their convenience, at the same time, is being manipulated by its own tools. Our technological advances have made us lose sight of ourselves and complicated our lives with new kinds of crime and ever more strained relations with one another.

In addition to this situation, mankind as ruler on earth, almost dominating the entire planet, lets the human population grow rapidly; we waste food, water, land, forests, oil and other resources which are now becoming scarce. This, in turn, has brought about the dangerous “resource wars”, as well as producing masses of refugees, rising global social tensions and chaos. These innumerable “global problems” have led us to crisis point, the scale of which has never been experienced in the history of mankind. If we do not search for a real solution to these global problems mankind will be wiped out. In spite of the imminence of this threat, the joint measures and cooperative efforts needed to overcome it are severely lacking. The reason for this current impasse, it can be argued, lies at the very heart of man's often contradictory conduct.

Even if the problems listed above are separated into distinct domains they still share as a common origin human desire, human will and human action. There is no denying that everyone throughout the world will suffer the consequences of these problems. Therefore we, the members of the Association of Synthetic Anthropology, declare that a frank self-examination is unavoidable for what is human to cope with the global crisis of today. We think it is no exaggeration to say that the contradictions of our civilization is currently facing have their roots in the self-alienation of the human being.

We think, like the oracle of the ancient Greek temple, that we have to “know thyself”, and that synthetic anthropology can help with this task. The task of “know thyself” doesn’t stop at the questions in the theory of civilization mentioned above but include all problems concerning the way of life of all thinking people. We have to think about the questions of what we are and how we should live. If we don’t think about what we are, existing as a kind of unthinking matter, then there is no value in being born as a human being.

This unreflective existence has never been more of a threat than today when the mere business of daily life makes so many demands. Most of us are sinking under an overload of information, work and the daily occurrences of our everyday lives. We just do not have the time to reflect upon ourselves and think deeply about the meaning of “living”. We have so much to think about and so little time to think it through. This extraordinary paradox is just one example of the alienating effect of modern life.

In this situation, to reconsider humanity as a whole and to rethink the condition of our civilization from its roots, should we not establish a space to determine the essence of contemporary science and philosophy – an open space for enriching discussion? With this thought in mind, we are calling upon thinking people to establish a new anthropology and discover a new common ground. It goes without saying that this is an extraordinarily difficult task. At the beginning of the twentieth-century, brilliant intellectuals quickly developed various specialised fields within the sciences, and at the same time, obscured the question of the “real nature of human beings”. Their efforts

defined the modern era as one in which the fundamental question of what it means to be human would be ignored

In only half a century the “revolution of science” has given rise to specialised fields within physics, biology, electronics, neuroscience, and so on. And yet the irony is that these new fields of enquiry have made it difficult to articulate precisely what it means to be human. With this tendency growing stronger and stronger, a unified knowledge of humanity is drifting further from sight; only if we make an active search for it can it be recovered. In a paradoxical fashion, this move away from a unified knowledge of humanity has created a need for a space where, through research and discussion, we might forge a new understanding of mankind and our world.

Of course this work will be demanding; the mere organization of such an association requires much hard work. Moreover, from the methodological viewpoint, a synthetic understanding necessitates stepping into areas where no verification is possible, as well as crossing the borders of the scientific episteme. But if we do not attempt to overcome the limits of the reductionist individual field of every science, anthropology will definitely fail, and the way to humanity’s self-recognition and its history will be abandoned. There is only one way out of this state of stagnation: to gather the individual research of every field and select what is indispensable to a better understanding. This can only be done through the systematic ordering of scientific knowledge and the adoption of a synthetic perspective.

For this purpose our first task will be to systemize the different subjects, to develop concrete research projects and to stimulate discussion which addresses several points of view. In order to achieve this, we have to create a generous space where people from the different fields of science may freely enter into dialogue. Hence we are launching the Association of Synthetic Anthropology and calling for a space of “open science” to all sincere “learners” with the same intentions. We invite all people in Japan with the same wish to support us in this endeavour.