

Socrates' Linguistic Turn

Takafusa Tanaka

In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates explains his life of philosophy and says that daily to discourse about virtue is the greatest good of man. In this way he declares the power of language and proposes a new form of human life. His reasoning is as follows: to discuss and examine our use of language of the virtues will improve our mind and our soul, and will enable us to live the best life for human beings.

In his discourse with his fellow citizens Socrates used to pick up one of the names of the virtues, e.g. 'bravery', and asked the partner what it meant. And when the partner proposed a definition or usage of the word, Socrates asked further questions about the proposed definition. In the course of this question-and-answer examination, it usually turned out that the first answer was inexact and liable to cause erroneous act. In this way Socrates and his partners tried to find the correct and exact usage of the words of virtue in the hope that they will find the correct and exact aim of their actions in daily life.

Plato and Aristotle inherited this Socratic philosophy of linguistic usage, and developed it into a more general method. In his *Republic* Plato names the method 'dialectic' and says that there one must solely rely upon the logic of words (this reminds us Socrates' 'refugee into the logic of words' in the *Phaedo*). And, according to his story of recollection of immortal soul of human beings in the *Meno*, we should probably interpret the above 'logic of words' to be the logic of words of an actual traditional language.

Aristotle, on the other hand, analyzed the structure of the human action and found that a rational action is composed of practical syllogism which is a chain of words. But for us to live is to act. So, Aristotle demonstrated that we live with words. In this way Aristotle proved that Socrates was right in his recommendation of life of linguistic examination.