ESSAYS

NATSUME SŌSEKI

Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) is, by common agreement, Japan's greatest novelist of this period. His works also are the most difficult to fit into an anthology. Nearly all of Sōseki's novels and other writings are quite long, and to include only parts of such beautifully crafted works as *Kokoro*, *The Wayfarer* (*Kōjin*), and *Grass by the Wayside* (*Kusamakura*) would be a disservice to both the writer and the reader. Because most of Sōseki's major novels are now available in English translation, it is our hope that readers will seek out for themselves these remarkable accounts of their author's spiritual journey.

It seems more appropriate, therefore, to introduce Sōseki in this anthology as an essayist. Even though his essays are highly respected and appreciated in Japan, elsewhere their translations are not as well known. Both the essays excerpted here began as lectures but had a wide circulation when they were printed. Although the first sections are discursive and rambling, the principal issues are stated succinctly and resonate with readers even today.

The first essay is a lecture entitled "The Civilization of Modern-Day Japan" (Gendai Nihon no kaika), which Sōseki delivered in 1911. Once his subject comes into focus, he offers an account of the spiritual pains felt by those living in a shifting society. For many Japanese readers, this essay has remained a crucial statement of the ambiguities of twentieth-century Japanese life.

The second essay is a lecture entitled "My Individualism" (Watakushi no kojinshugi), delivered in 1914. It is as close as Sōseki ever came to a statement about his own life and aspirations as an artist.

THE CIVILIZATION OF MODERN-DAY JAPAN (GENDAI NIHON NO KAIKA)

Translated by Jay Rubin

Well, then, what do we mean by "civilization"? My guess is that you do not understand the civilization of modern-day Japan. By this I mean no disrespect toward you. None of us really understands it, and that includes me. I just happen to be in a position that gives me more time than you have to think about such matters, and this lecture allows me to share my thoughts with you. All of you are Japanese, and so am I; we live in the modern age, not the past or the future, and our civilization influences us all; it is obvious that the three words "modern," "Japan," and "civilization" bind us together inseparably. If, however, we remain unconscious of the civilization of modern-day Japan or if we do not have a clear understanding of what it means, this can adversely affect everything we do. We will all be better off, I believe, if, together, we study this concept and help each other understand it. . . .

I believe that this infinitely complex phenomenon we call civilization arises from the advancement, entanglement, and ongoing change of these two parallel mentalities: the conservation of our vital energies as a negative response to the stimulus of duty, and the consumption of our vital energies as a positive response to the stimulus of pleasurable pastimes. The results are immediately apparent if we witness the state of the society in which we ourselves live. The conservation of energy is obvious in the ways we contrive to labor as little as possible, to accomplish the maximum amount of work in the minimum amount of time. These contrivances take amazing shapes: not only trains and steamships, but the telegraph, the telephone, and the automobile—all of which are, finally, nothing more than conveniences developed from an unabashed desire to avoid effort. . . .

Thanks to this kind of magic, distances are shortened, time is diminished, bother is eliminated, all compulsory effort is reduced to a minimum, then reduced again, and before we find out how far we can push this process, along comes the opposite, "energy-consuming" impulse, the desire for enjoyment, urging us to do exactly as we please, and this, too, goes on and on, developing naturally, advancing without a moment's intermission.

The moralists may grumble about the development of our desire for enjoyment, but that is strictly an ethical question, not a practical one. The simple fact is that the impulse to find ways to consume our energies by doing what pleases us keeps working around the clock, developing without a break. Only the existence of society causes a man to have compulsory actions thrust upon him, but give that man his freedom and he will inevitably try to consume his mental powers, his physical powers, on stimuli that please him because it is perfectly natural for him to operate from an egocentric standpoint. . . .

In any case, we have these two intertwining processes, one involving inventions and mechanisms that spring from the desire to conserve our labor as much as possible, and the other involving amusements that spring from the wish to consume our energies as freely as possible. As these two intertwine like a textile's warp and woof, combining in infinitely varied ways, the result is this strange, chaotic phenomenon we know as our modern civilization.

If this is what we mean by "civilization," a strange paradox arises, a phenomenon that at first glance seems rather odd but whose truth everyone must recognize. Why, we might ask, has man followed the stream of civilization from its beginnings to the present day, manifesting these two types of energy? The answer is simply that we are born that way. In other words, everything we have today is the result of these inborn tendencies of ours. We could not have survived if we had simply stood by with our arms folded. Pushed along from one thing to the next, we have toiled and toiled for thousands of years, finally developing to the point where we find ourselves today.

As a result of the contrivances wrought by these two kinds of vital energy from ancient times to the present, life should be far easier for us than it was for

our ancestors. But is life, in fact, easier for us? I would have to say that it is not. For you and for me, life is enormously painful. You and I both know that we live with pain no less extreme than that which was felt by the men of old. Indeed, the more civilization progresses, the more intense the competition becomes, only adding to the difficulty of our lives. True enough, thanks to the violent struggle of the two energies, civilization has attained its present triumph, but "civilization" in this sense means only that our general standard of living has risen; it does not mean that the pain of existence has been softened for us to any extent. Just as academic competition is equally painful for both the grammar school child and the university student, though at different levels, there may be a huge difference between people in the old days and people now where energy-consuming and energy-conserving mechanisms are concerned, but when it comes to relative degrees of happiness (or unhappiness), the anxieties and exertions that arise from the struggle for existence are no less for us today than they were for our ancestors. If anything, they may even be more painful. Back then it was a matter of life and death: if you didn't make the necessary exertions, you died and that was that. You did it because you had no choice. You didn't think about enjoyment; the means for seeking pleasure had not been developed. People were satisfied just to stretch out their legs or let their arms hang down: It was probably all the enjoyment they could hope for.

Today, we have long since transcended the problem of life and death. Now, it's more a matter of life and life. I know that sounds funny, but by this I mean that now our most taxing problem is whether to live in circumstances A or in circumstances B. To cite an example of the energy-conservation type, competition now raises the question of whether a man is going to make a living by dragging a rickshaw around the streets or by grasping the steering wheel of an automobile. Whichever he chooses, this will not determine whether he lives or dies. The amount of labor involved, however, will certainly not be the same. He will sweat a lot more pulling that rickshaw. If he drives passengers around in an automobile (of course, if he can afford an automobile, he won't have any need to drive passengers around), he can cover longer distances in shorter times. He doesn't have to exert himself physically. As a result of the conservation of vital energy, he has an easier job. In contrast to the old days, now that the automobile has been invented, the rickshaw will inevitably fall behind. Having fallen behind, the rickshaw will have to struggle to keep up.

In this way, when something appears on the horizon that is superior by virtue of its ability, however small, to conserve energy, and this provokes a wave of disruption, a phenomenon resembling a kind of low-pressure zone occurs in the civilization, and until its components return to a state of balance and proportion, the people of that civilization have no choice but to continue in restless motion. Indeed, it is their very nature to do so. . . .

Assuming, then, that the momentum of civilization consists of increasingly ferocious competition in both the positive and negative areas, it would appear

that we have done our utmost over the ages to wring out some bit of wisdom, developing at last to where we are today, and yet it seems to me that the psychological pain that life thrusts upon us may be no more nor less than it was fifty or even a hundred years ago. Even with all the machines we have today to reduce our labors, even with all the means of amusement we now have for the free enjoyment of our vital energies, the pain of existence is far more intense than one would have imagined. Perhaps it would not be overstating the case to call the pain extreme. What else can we call it when we fail to appreciate the sheer fact of our having been born in an age of such vastly reduced labor and when the magnified means and scope of our amusements fail to arouse in us the appropriate sense of gratitude? This is the great paradox to which civilization has given birth.

And now the time has come to discuss the civilization of Japan. If civilization in general is as I have described it, and Japan's civilization is simply another example, that would pretty well take care of what I wanted to say, and I could end this lecture. Unfortunately, however, Japan's case is special and cannot be dispensed with so easily. . . .

The question facing us is this: How does the civilization of modern-day Japan differ from civilization in general as I have been discussing it? Simply stated, Western civilization (that is, civilization in general) is internally motivated, whereas Japan's civilization is externally motivated. Something that is "internally motivated" develops naturally from within, as a flower opens, the bursting of the bud followed by the turning outward of the petals. Something is "externally motivated" when it is forced to assume a certain form as the result of pressure applied from the outside.

Western civilization flows along as naturally as clouds or a river, which is not at all what we see in the case of Japan since the Meiji Restoration and the opening of relations with the West. Of course, all countries are influenced to some degree by their neighbors, and Japan is no exception: We have certainly not developed separately, relying exclusively on our own vital energies. There have been periods in our history when we were profoundly under the sway of foreign cultures—of Korea, for example, or China. But overall, viewed in the long course of events, we can say with some confidence that we have advanced to where we are today with a more or less internally motivated civilization. Certainly, Japan had never experienced any foreign influence as intense as that of the sudden influx of Western culture. There we were, slumbering for two hundred years in an atmosphere of sealed ports and foreign exclusion, when it jolted us awake.

From that time on, Japan's civilization began twisting and turning dramatically. The impact of the West was so great that we simply had no choice but to continue twisting and turning. To rephrase it in terms I used earlier, we were a country that had until then developed according to our own internal motivation. But then we suddenly lost our ability to be self-centered and were confronted by

a situation in which we could not survive unless we began taking orders from the external force that was pushing us around at will. Nor was this by any means a temporary situation. The year is Meiji 44, after all: We've been bracing ourselves for close to fifty years. And not only have we been pushed and shoved along from that day to this, but unless we continue to be pushed along for years to come—perhaps forever—Japan will not be able to survive as Japan. What else can we call ourselves but externally motivated?

The reason for this is obvious. If I may return to the definition of civilization that I formulated earlier at such length, Western civilization—this civilization we first collided with some fifty years ago and are incapable of avoiding contact with today—possesses labor-conserving means many times more powerful than our own, and it is equipped, too, with the ability to utilize its vital energies in the area of amusement and enjoyment many times more actively than we can. As a rough illustration, say Japan has gone along developing by internal motivation until, at long last, it brings its civilization to a complexity level of ten. We've just barely managed to reach that point when, all of a sudden, out of the clear blue sky, a civilization that has advanced to a complexity level of twenty or even thirty comes along and crashes into us. Because of the pressure this new civilization exerts on us, we have no choice but to develop in unnatural ways. And so the civilization of Japan today does not plod along at its own steady pace, but instead it leaps ahead from one desperate round to the next. Lacking the freedom to climb the stairway of civilization one step at a time, we take a stitch here and a stitch there with the biggest needle we can find. For every ten feet of ground we cover, we touch down on only one, virtually missing the other nine. Now, perhaps, you see what I mean by the term "externally motivated." . . .

Now, if we examine the group's consciousness as a whole, I would conclude that there exists a clear consciousness that can encompass a long unit of time—be it a month, a year, or whatever—and that this consciousness ebbs and flows, moving in turn from one event to another. We all do this individually when we look back on our lives and discover distinct units of consciousness—our middle school years, say, or our university years: periods that stand out distinctly enough to have special names attached to them. A few years ago, from 1904 to 1905, the collective consciousness of the Japanese as a whole was focused exclusively on the Russo-Japanese War. Then came the period when we were occupied with a consciousness of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. When, through induction, we thus expand the psychologists' analyses and apply them to the collective or long-term consciousness, we must conclude that the process of the development of man's vital energies—that is, civilization—progresses in waves, stringing one arc after another in a constantly advancing line. Of course, the number of waves thus traced is infinite, the length and height of each potentially different from all the others, but finally they must move along in order, wave A calling forth wave B, B calling forth C, and so on. Simply stated, the progress of civilization should be internally motivated. . . .

The question facing us is whether or not Japan's civilization is advancing by means of internal motivation, tracing a natural motion from wave A to B to C. The answer, unfortunately, is that it is not, and that is the trouble. Because of external pressure, Japan has had to leap all at once from a barely attained complexity level of twenty to a level of thirty in the two great areas of energy conservation and energy consumption. The country is like a man who has been snatched up by a flying monster. The man clings desperately to the monster, afraid of being dropped, hardly aware of the course he is following.

In the normal order of events, wave A of a civilization yields to wave B only when people have drunk their fill of A and have become satiated, at which time new desires arise from within and a new wave develops. A new stage of life opens before us after we have tasted the old one to the full, both the good and the bad, the bitter and the sweet. Then we leave the first wave behind without regret, as a snake sheds its skin. And then whatever difficulties we may experience with the new wave, at least we never feel that we are dressing up in borrowed clothing, putting on a false front. But the waves that govern Japan's present civilization roll in on us from the West. We who ride these waves are Japanese, not Westerners, and so we feel out of place with each new surge, like uninvited guests. There is no question of our understanding the new wave, for we have not had time to appreciate the features of the old one that we have cast off so reluctantly. It is like sitting at a dinner table and having one dish after another set before us and then taken away so quickly that, far from getting a good taste of each one, we can't even enjoy a clear look at what is being served.

A nation, a people, that incurs a civilization like this can only feel a sense of emptiness, of dissatisfaction and anxiety. There are those who gloat over this civilization of ours as if it were internally motivated, but they are wrong. They may think that they represent the height of fashion, but they are wrong. They are false and shallow, like boys who make a great show of enjoying cigarettes before they even know what tobacco tastes like. This is what the Japanese must do in order to survive, and this is what makes us so pitiful.

Here is an example that may not come under the heading of "civilization," but just look at how we socialize with Westerners: always according to *their* rules, never ours. Why, then, do we not just stop socializing with them? Sadly enough, we have no choice in the matter. And when two unequal parties socialize, they do so according to the customs of the stronger. One Japanese may make fun of another for not knowing the proper way to hold a knife or fork, but such smug behavior only proves that the Westerners are stronger than we are. If we were the stronger, it would be a simple matter for us to take the lead and make them imitate us. Instead, we must imitate them. And because age-old customs cannot be changed overnight, all we can do is mechanically memorize Western manners—manners which, on us, look ridiculous.

All of this talk about silverware and manners may seem very trivial and have nothing to do with civilization, but that is exactly my point: everything we

do—every trivial little act—is not internally, but externally motivated. This tells us that the civilization of modern-day Japan is superficial: it just skims the surface. Of course, I am not saying that this is true of absolutely everything. Such radical pronouncements should be avoided in dealing with complex problems, but the fact remains that no matter how much we view our civilization in our own favor, we cannot escape the conclusion that a part—perhaps the greatest part—of our civilization is superficial. This is not to say that we must put a stop to it. There is really nothing we can do about it. We must go on skimming the surface, fighting back our tears.

You may wonder, then, whether it is finally impossible for us to cease being the child carried along on a grown-up's back, for us to forge ahead on our own through all the proper stages of development. I would answer no, it is not impossible. But if the Japanese were able to condense into ten years all the developments that it took the West a hundred years to accomplish—to do this in such a way as to avoid the accusation of hollowness and convince all onlookers that the progress was internally motivated—the results would be devastating. Even a beginner in mathematics could see that our vital energies would have to increase tenfold in order for us to accomplish a hundred years' worth of experience in a tenth of the time without skimming the surface.

I can illustrate this point most easily by referring to the academic world. Let us suppose that through the forty-odd years of educational efforts that we have expended since the Meiji Restoration, we were able to arrive at the high degree of academic specialization that the Westerners realized after a hundred years and that we were able to do this entirely through internal motivation and without relying on any half-digested theories imported from the West, passing through a natural series of stages from theory A to B to C, entirely as a result of our own original research. If the Westerners, whose mental and physical powers far surpass ours, took a hundred years to get where they are now and we were able to reach that point in less than half that time (forgetting for the moment the difficulties they faced as pioneers), then we could certainly boast of an astounding intellectual accomplishment, but we would also succumb to an incurable nervous breakdown; we would fall by the wayside gasping for breath. And this is in no way farfetched. If you stop and think about it, a nervous breakdown is exactly what most university professors end up with after ten years of hard work. The healthy ones are merely phony scholars, or if that's putting it too bluntly, let's just say that succumbing to a nervous breakdown is more or less to be expected in that profession. I use scholars here simply because their example is so easy to grasp, but I believe the logic can be applied to all areas of civilization.

I said earlier that for all its progress, civilization favors us with so little peace of mind that if we consider the added anxieties thrust on us by competition and the like, our happiness is probably not very different from what it was in the Stone Age. If we add to that what I just now said about the nervous breakdown we experience from trying not to skim the surface as our civilization is forced to

change mechanically because of the unique situation Japan now finds itself in, we Japanese come out looking pretty miserable, or—shall I say?—pathetic: our situation is simply appalling. That is my only conclusion; I have no advice to give, no remedies to suggest, because I do not believe there is anything anyone can do about it. I am simply lamenting the sad fact of it all.

Assuming that my analysis is correct, we can only view Japan's future with pessimism. There seem to be fewer of us nowadays ridiculous enough to boast of Mount Fuji to foreigners, but we do hear many people proclaiming that victory over Russia made Japan a first-class power. I suppose one can make such claims if one is an incurable optimist. But what are we to do? How are we to cut our way through this desperate situation? As I said before, I have no clever solutions. The best answer I can come up with is that we probably should go on changing through internal motivation while trying our best to avoid a nervous breakdown.

I apologize for having exposed you so mercilessly to the bitter truth as I see it and for having given you something unpleasant to think about, if only for an hour or so, but I hope that you will appreciate the fact that I have shared with you today my own most deeply held opinions, based on substantial evidence and on my fullest intellectual efforts and that this will allow you to forgive the weak points in my presentation.

MY INDIVIDUALISM (WATAKUSHI NO KOJINSHUGI)

Translated by Jay Rubin

Having been born into the world, I had to find something to do. But what that something was, I had no idea. I stood paralyzed, alone and shut in by a fog, hoping that a single ray of sunlight would shine through to me, hoping even more that I could turn a searchlight outward and find a lighted path ahead, however narrow. But wherever I looked, there was only obscurity, a formless blur. I felt as if I had been sealed in a sack, unable to escape. If only I had something sharp, I could tear a hole in the sack, I thought, struggling frantically, but no one handed me what I needed, nor could I find it for myself. There was nothing for me to do but spend day after day in a pall of gloom that I concealed from others even as I kept asking myself, "What will become of me?"

I graduated from the university clutching this anxiety to my breast. I took it with me to Matsuyama and from Matsuyama to Kumamoto. And when at last, I journeyed to England, the anxiety was still there, deep within me.

Given the opportunity to study abroad, anyone would feel some new sense of responsibility. I worked hard. I strove to accomplish something. But none of the books I read helped me tear my way through the sack. I could search from one end of London to the other, I felt, and never find what I needed. I stayed in my room, thinking how absurd this all was. No amount of reading was going to fill this emptiness in the pit of my stomach. And when I resigned myself

to the hopelessness of my task, I could no longer see any point to my reading books.

It was then that I realized that my only hope for salvation lay in fashioning for myself a conception of what literature is, working from the ground up and relying on nothing but my own efforts. At long last I saw that I had been no better than a rootless, floating weed, drifting aimlessly and wholly centered on others—"other-centered"—in the sense of an imitator, a man who has someone else drink his liquor for him, who asks the other fellow's opinion of it and makes that opinion his own without question. Yes, it sounds foolish when I put it like this, and you may well doubt that there could be people who would imitate others in this manner. But in fact, there are. Why do you think you hear so much about Bergson these days, or Eucken? Simply because Japanese see what is being talked about abroad and, in imitation, they begin shouting about it at home.

In my day, it was even worse. Attribute something—anything—to a Westerner, and people would follow it blindly, acting meanwhile as though it made them very important. Everywhere, there were men who thought themselves extremely clever because they could fill their speech with foreign names. Practically everyone was doing it. I say this not in condemnation of others, however: I myself was one of those men. I might read one European's critique of another European's book, for example. Then, never considering the merits of the critique, without in fact understanding it, I would spout it as my own. This piece of mechanically acquired information, this alien thing that I had swallowed whole, that was neither possession nor blood nor flesh of mine, I would regurgitate in the guise of personal opinion. And the times being what they were, everyone would applaud.

No amount of applause, however, could quiet any anxiety, for I myself knew that I was boasting of borrowed clothes, preening with glued-on peacock feathers. I began to see that I must abandon this empty display and move toward something more genuine, for until I did, the anxiety in the pit of my stomach would never go away.

A Westerner might say a poem was very fine, for example, or its tone extremely good, but this was his view, his Western view, and while certainly not irrelevant, it was nothing that I had to repeat if I could not agree with it. I was an independent Japanese, not a slave to England, and it was incumbent on me *as* a Japanese to possess at least this degree of self-respect. A respect for honesty, as well, the ethic shared by all nations, forbade me to alter my opinion. . . .

My next step was to strengthen—perhaps I should say to build anew—the foundations on which I stood in my study of literature. For this, I began to read books that had nothing whatever to do with literature. If, before, I had been other-centered, it occurred to me now that I must become self-centered. I became absorbed in scientific studies, philosophical speculation, anything that would support this position. Now the times are different and the need for

self-centeredness should be clear to anyone who has done some thinking, but I was immature then, and the world around me was still not very advanced. There was really no other way for me to proceed.

Once I had grasped this idea of self-centeredness, it became for me an enormous fund of strength, even defiance. Who did these Westerners think they were, anyway? I had been feeling lost, in a daze, when the idea of ego-centeredness told me where to stand, showed me the road I must take.

Self-centeredness became for me a new beginning, I confess, and it helped me find what I thought would be my life's work. I resolved to write books, to tell people that they need not imitate Westerners, that running blindly after others as they were doing would only cause them great anxiety. If I could spell this out for them with unshakable proof, it would give me pleasure and make them happy as well. This was what I hoped to accomplish.

My anxiety disappeared without a trace. I looked out on London's gloom with a happy heart. I felt that after years of agony, my pick had at least struck a vein of ore. A ray of light had broken through the fog and illuminated my way.

At the time that I experienced this enlightenment, I had been in England for more than a year. There was no hope of my accomplishing the task I had set for myself while I was in a foreign country. I decided to collect all the materials I could find and to complete my work after returning to Japan. As it happened, then, I would return to Japan with a strength I had not possessed when I left for England. . . .

The idea that came to me at the time, however, the idea of self-centeredness, has stayed with me. Indeed, it has grown stronger with the passing of each year. My projected work ended in failure, but I had found a belief that I could get my hands on, the conviction that I was the single most important person in my life while others were only secondary. This has given me enormous confidence and peace of mind, and I feel that it will continue to make it possible for me to live. Its strength may well be what enables me to be standing here like this lecturing to young men like yourselves.

In my talk so far I have tried to give you a rough idea of what my experience has been, my only motive being a sort of grandmotherly hope that it will be of some relevance to your own situations. All of you will leave school and go out into the world. For many of you, this will not happen for some time yet. Others will be active in the real world before long. But I suspect that all of you are likely to repeat the agony—perhaps a different kind of agony—that I once experienced. There must be those among you who, as I once did, want desperately to break through to something but cannot, who want to get a firm hold on something but meet with as maddeningly little success as you would in trying to grasp a slippery, hairless pate. Those of you who may have already carved out a way for yourselves are certainly the exception.

There may be some who are satisfied to travel the old, proven routes behind others, and I do not say you are wrong in doing so—*if* it gives you genuine, unshakable peace of mind and self-confidence. If it does not, however, you must

continue to dig ahead with your very own pick until you strike that vein of ore. I repeat, you *must* do it, for anyone who is unable to strike home will be unhappy for life, straying through the world in an endless, uneasy crouch. I urge you on so emphatically because I want to help you avoid such a predicament. I have absolutely no intention of suggesting that you take me as a model for emulation. I know that I have succeeded in making my own way, and however unimpressive it may appear to you, that is entirely a matter of your observation and critical judgment and does me no injury at all. I am satisfied with the route I have taken, but let there be no misunderstanding: It may have given *me* confidence and peace of mind, but I do not for a moment believe that it can, for that reason, serve as a model for you.

In any case, I would suspect that the same kind of anguish I experienced lies in store for many of you. And if indeed it does, then I hope you will see the necessity for men such as yourselves engaged in learning and education to forge ahead until you collide with something, whether you must work at it for ten years, twenty years—a lifetime. "I have found my way at last! I have struck home at last!" Only when this exclamation echoes from the bottom of your heart will your heart find peace. And with that shout will arise within you an indestructible self-confidence. Perhaps a goodly number of you have already reached that stage, but if there are any of you now suffering the anguish of being trapped somewhere in a fog, I believe that you should forge ahead until you know that you have struck home, whatever the sacrifice. I urge you to accomplish this, *not* for the nation's sake or even for the sake of your families, but because it is absolutely necessary for your own personal happiness. If you have already taken a route similar to mine, then what I have to say here will be of little use to you, but if there is something holding you back, you must press on until you have trampled it to dust. Of course, simply pressing on will not in itself reveal to you the direction you must take: all that you can do is go forward until you collide with something.

I do not mean to stand up here and preach to you, but I cannot keep silent when I know that a part of your future happiness is at stake. I speak out because it seems to me that you would hate it if you were always in some amorphous state of mind, if deep down inside you there were nothing but some half-formed, inconclusive, jellyfish sort of thing. If you insist that it does not bother you to feel like that, there is nothing I can say; if you insist that you have gone beyond such unhappiness, that is splendid, too: it is everything I wish for you. But I myself was unable to go beyond that unhappiness even after I had left school—indeed, until I was over thirty. It was, to be sure, a dull ache that afflicted me but one that persisted year after year. That is why I want so badly for you—any of you who have caught the disease that I once had—to forge bravely onward. I ask you to do this because I believe that you will be able to find the place where you belong and that you will attain peace of mind and self-confidence to last a lifetime. . . .

Gakushūin is generally thought of as—and, in fact, it surely is—a school for young men of good social position. If, as I suspect, the sons of the upper classes gather here to the exclusion of the genuinely poor, then foremost among the many things that will accrue to you in the years to come must be mentioned power. In other words, when you go out into the world, you will have a good deal more power at your disposal than would a poor man.

I did say earlier that you must forge ahead in your work until you strike home in order to attain happiness and peace of mind, but what is it that brings that happiness and peace of mind? You make peace with yourself when the individuality with which you were born arrives where it belongs. And when you have settled on the track and move steadily forward, that individuality of yours proceeds to grow and develop. Only when your individuality and your work are in perfect harmony can you claim to have found the place where you belong.

With this understood, let us consider what is meant by the word "power." Power is a tool by means of which one forces his individuality on others. If this sounds too arbitrary, let us say that power *can be used* as such a tool.

After power comes money. This, too, is something that you will have more of at your disposal than would a poor man. Viewed in the context in which I have viewed power, money—financial power—can be an exceedingly useful tool for aggrandizing one's individuality through the temptation of others.

Thus, we would have to characterize power and money as enormously convenient implements, for with them one is able to impose one's individuality on other men or to entice them in any direction, as a poor man never could. A man with this kind of power seems very important; in fact, he is very dangerous.

Earlier, I spoke primarily with reference to education, literature, and culture when I said that individuality could develop only when one has reached the place where one belongs. But individuality functions in areas well beyond the confines of the liberal arts. I know two brothers, the younger of whom likes to stay at home reading, while the elder is fanatically devoted to fishing. The elder is disgusted with his brother's reclusive ways, his habit of staying bottled up in the house all day long. He's decided that his brother has turned into a world-weary misanthrope because he doesn't go fishing, and he does all he can to drag him along. The younger brother hates the idea, but the elder loads him down with fishing gear and demands that he accompany him to the pond. The younger brother grits his teeth and goes along, hoping he won't catch anything. But luck is against him: He spends the day pulling in sickening, fat carp. And what is the upshot of all this? Does the elder's plan work? Does his brother's personality change for the better? No, of course not. He ends up hating fishing all the more. We might say that fishing and the elder brother's personality are a perfect match; they fit together without the slightest gap in between. It is strictly a matter of *his* personality, however, and has nothing to do with his brother's nature.

What I have tried to do here is to explain how power is used to coerce others. The elder's individuality oppresses the younger and forces him to go fishing against his will. Granted, there are situations where such oppressive methods are unavoidable—in the classroom, say, or the army, or in the kind of dormitory that stresses military discipline. But all I have in mind in this instance is the situation that will prevail when you become independent and go out into the world.

So then let us suppose you are fortunate enough to collide with something you think is good, something you like, something that matches your personality. You go on to develop your individuality, meanwhile forgetting the distinction between yourself and others, and you decide that you are going to get this fellow or that fellow into your camp—even if it means dragging him into it. If you have power, then you will end up with a strange relationship like that of the two brothers. If you have money, you will spread it around, trying to make the other fellow over in your own image. You use the money as a tool of enticement, and with its seductive power you try to change the other fellow into something that pleases you more. Either way, you are very dangerous.

And so it is that my ideas on the subject have come down to this: first, that you will be unhappy for life unless you press on to the point where you discover work that suits you perfectly and enables you to develop your individuality; second, that if society is going to allow you such regard for your own individuality, it only makes sense for you to recognize the individuality of others and show a similar regard for their inclinations. To me, this seems not only necessary but proper. I think it is wrong for you to blame the other fellow for facing left simply because you, by nature, face right. Of course, when it comes to complex questions of good and evil, right and wrong, some fairly detailed examination of the facts may be called for. But where no such questions are involved or where the questions are not particularly difficult, I can only believe that so long as others grant us liberty, we must grant equal liberty to them and treat them as equals.

There has been a good deal of talk about "the ego" and "self-awareness" these days as a justification for unrestrained self-assertion. You should be on your guard against those who spout such nonsense, for while they hold their own egos in the highest esteem, they make no allowance whatsoever for other people's egos. I firmly believe that if one has any sense of fairness, if one has any idea of justice, one must grant others the freedom to develop their individuality for the sake of their personal happiness, even as one secures it for oneself. Unless we have a very good reason, we must not be allowed to obstruct others from developing their individuality as they please for the sake of their own happiness. I speak of "obstruction" because many of you here will surely be in positions from which you will one day be able to obstruct others; many among you will be able one day to exploit your power and your money.

Properly speaking, there should be no such thing as power that is unaccompanied by obligation. As long as I reserve the right to stand up here looking

down at you and to keep you listening quietly to what I have to say for an hour or more, I should be saying something worthy of keeping you quiet. Or at least if I am going to bore you with a mediocre talk like this one, I had better make certain that my manner and appearance have the dignity to command your respect. Oh, I suppose we could say that you have to behave yourselves because you are the hosts and I am the guest, but that is quite beside the point. It stops short at superficial etiquette—convention—and has nothing whatsoever to do with the spirit.

Let me give you another example. I am certain you all know what it is like to be scolded by your teachers. But if there is in this world a teacher who does nothing but scold, that teacher is simply unqualified to teach. A teacher who is going to scold must give himself entirely to his teaching, for a teacher who has a right to scold also has a duty to teach. Teachers, as you know, make full use of the right they are given to maintain order and discipline. But there is a duty inseparable from that right, and if they do not discharge it, they cannot live up to the functions implicit in their profession.

The same holds true of money. As I see it, there should be no financially powerful man in this world who does not understand responsibility. Let me explain what I mean. Money is exceptionally handy to have around. It can be used for anything with the utmost flexibility. Let's say I make a hundred thousand yen on the stock market. With that money, I can build a house, I can buy books, I can even have a good time in the pleasure quarters. Money can take any form at all. But I think you will agree when I say that the most frightening thing money can do is buy men's minds. This means throwing it down as bait and buying out a man's moral sense, making it a tool to corrupt his soul. Now, assuming that the money I've made on the stock market can have a great ethical and moral impact, we would have to conclude that this is an improper application of money—or so it would seem. And yet this is how money functions; this is a fact we must live with. The only way to prevent it from corrupting the human heart is for those who have money to have a sense of decency and to use their money wisely so that it will do no moral damage. This is why money must always be accompanied by responsibility. One must cultivate sufficient discrimination to appreciate the influence one's money will have in any given situation, and one must manage one's money as responsibly as one's discrimination demands. To do less is to wrong not only the world at large but to wrong oneself.

Everything I have said thus far comes down to these three points: First, if you want to carry out the development of your individuality, you must respect the individuality of others. Second, if you intend to utilize the power in your possession, you must be fully cognizant of the duty that accompanies it. Third, if you wish to demonstrate your financial power, you must respect its concomitant responsibilities.

To put this another way: Unless a man has attained some degree of ethical culture, there is no value in his developing his individuality, no value in his

using his power or wealth. Or yet again: In order for him to enjoy these three privileges, he must submit to the control imposed by the character that should accompany such privileges. When a man is devoid of character, everything he does presents a threat. When he seeks to develop his individuality without restraints, he obstructs others; when he attempts to use power, he merely abuses it; when he tries to use money, he corrupts society. Some day you will be in a position where you can do all of these things quite easily. That is why you must not fail to become upstanding men of character.

Let me change the subject for a moment. England, as you know, is a country that cherishes liberty. There is not another country in the world that so cherishes liberty while maintaining the degree of order that England does. I am not very fond of England, to tell you the truth. As much as I dislike the country, however, the fact is that no nation anywhere is so free and, at the same time, so very orderly. Japan cannot begin to compare with it. But the English are not merely free: They are taught from the time they are children to respect the freedom of others as they cherish their own. "Freedom" for them is never unaccompanied by the concept of duty. Nelson's famous declaration, "England expects every man to do his duty," was by no means limited to that particular wartime situation. It is a deep-rooted ideology that developed as an inseparable concomitant of liberty. They are like two sides of a single coin.

When the English have a complaint, they often stage protest demonstrations. The government, however, never interferes but takes an attitude of silent disinterest. The demonstrators, meanwhile, are fully appreciative of this and never engage in reckless activities that will embarrass the government. We see headlines nowadays about "suffragettes" committing violence, but these women are the exception. One might object that there are too many of them to be dismissed as an exception, but I think that is the only way we can view them. I don't know what it is with these "suffragettes"—perhaps they can't find husbands or they can't find jobs; maybe they are taking advantage of the long-ingrained ethos of respect for women. In any case, this is not the way the English have always behaved. Destroying famous paintings, going on hunger strikes in prison which makes life miserable for their jailers, tying themselves to benches in Parliament, and shouting in order to drown out the proceedings: Perhaps these women go through these unimaginable contortions because they know the men will use restraint in dealing with them. Whatever their reasons, they are an exception to the rule. In general, the English temperament cherishes liberty that does not depart from the concept of duty.

I am not suggesting that we take England as a model. I simply believe that freedom without a sense of duty is not true freedom, for such self-indulgent freedom cannot exist in society. And if for a moment, it did, it would quickly be expelled, stamped out by others. I sincerely wish for all of you to be free. At the same time I want to make very certain that you understand what we mean by

"duty." I believe in and practice individualism in this sense, and I do not hesitate to declare this before you now.

There must be no misunderstanding in what I mean by "individualism." I ask your undivided attention on this point, for it would be particularly unforgivable of me to instill misunderstanding in young men such as yourselves. Time is running short, so let me explain individualism as simply as I can. Individual liberty is indispensable for the development of the individuality that I spoke of earlier. And the development of your individuality will have a great bearing on your happiness. Thus it would seem to me that we must keep for ourselves and grant to others a degree of liberty such that I can turn left while you turn right, each of us equally unhindered so long as what we do has no effect on others. This is what I mean when I speak of individualism.

The same is true of power and money. What will happen if people abuse these things, if they exploit their wealth and power to attack men they happen not to like? This will surely destroy individuality and give rise to human misery. For example, what if the police commissioner had his men surround my house for no better reason than that the government did not take a fancy to me? The commissioner may actually have that much power, but decency will not permit him to use it in this manner. Or again, what if one of the great magnates—Mitsui, say, or Iwasaki—were to bribe our maid and have her oppose me in everything? If these individuals have the slightest bit of what we call character behind their money, it would never occur to them to commit such an injustice.

All such evils arise because people like that are incapable of understanding ethical individualism. They try, instead, to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the general public, to use their power—be it financial or otherwise—to further their own selfish ends. Thus it is that individualism—the individualism I am describing here—in no way resembles the danger to the nation that ignorant people imagine it to be. As I see it, individualism advocates respecting the existence of others at the same time that one respects one's own existence. I find that a most worthy philosophy.

More simply stated, individualism is a philosophy that replaces cliquism with values based on personal judgment of right and wrong. An individualist is not forever running with the group, forming cliques that thrash around blindly in the interests of power and money. That is why there lurks beneath the surface of his philosophy a loneliness unknown to others. As soon as we deny our little groups, then I simply go my way and I let the other man go his unhindered. Sometimes, in some instances, we cannot avoid becoming scattered. That is what is lonely.

Back when I was in charge of the literary column of the *Asahi shinbun*, we ran an article with an unflattering remark about Miyake Setsurei. It was a critical commentary, of course, not a personal attack, and it consisted of a mere line or two. I don't remember exactly when it was printed—perhaps while I was sick,

or possibly I *was* the one who gave the go-ahead—but in any case, this bit of criticism appeared in the *Asahi* literary column, which made them very angry over at Setsurei's magazine, *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin*. They didn't deal directly with me but approached a subordinate of mine, demanding a retraction. Setsurei himself, of course, had nothing to do with this. It was something that a few of his henchmen took it upon themselves to do. (Perhaps I should call them his "colleagues." "Henchmen" makes them sound like a bunch of thugs.) Well, these "colleagues" of his insisted on a retraction. We would have been happy to oblige them, of course, if it had been a question of factual error, but this was a critique, after all, and there was nothing we could do but insist on our right to publish what we wanted. Their demand was surprising enough in itself, but then some of these men at *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* started writing negative comments about me in every issue, which truly came as a shock. I never dealt with them directly, but when I heard what was going on, it made me feel very odd, for while I was acting out of individualism, they seemed to be functioning strictly as a clique. At times, I had gone so far as to publish negative reviews of my own novels in the literary column that I myself controlled, so it shocked me and made me feel very strange to see these "colleagues" of Setsurei angered by a little criticism. I know this will sound disrespectful, but I could not help feeling that they were living in the wrong century. They were like something out of the feudal age.

But even as I concluded this of Setsurei's men, I myself could not deny a sense of loneliness. Differences of opinion, I know, are bound to arise between the closest of friends. That is why I may have given advice to the many young men who frequent my home but have never—unless for some other substantial reason—tried to keep any of them from expressing their views. I acknowledge the existence of others; I grant them this degree of freedom. Thus I can never hope for another man to support me against his will, however wronged by someone I may feel. Herein lies the loneliness of individualism. Before the individualist will take a stand based on what others are doing, he chooses a course of action based on the merits of the case. Sometimes, as a result, he will find himself quite alone. He will miss the comfort of having allies. And that is as it should be: even matchsticks feel secure in a bundle.

I would like to add just another word to prevent any misunderstanding. Many people seem to think of individualism as something opposed to—even destructive of—nationalism. But individualism in no way justifies such a misguided, illogical interpretation. (Actually, I don't like these labels I've been using. People are not to be neatly defined by any single "ism." For clarity's sake, however, I am forced to discuss a variety of subjects under one heading.) Some people nowadays are spreading the idea—and they believe it—that Japan cannot survive unless it is entirely nationalistic. Many go so far as to assert that our nation will perish unless this terrible "individualism" is stamped out. What utter nonsense! All of us, in fact, are nationalists *and* internationalists *and* individualists as well.

Freedom is the essential substance of individualism, which, in turn, forms the foundation of individual happiness. Each man's share of freedom, however, rises and falls like a thermometer in accordance with the relative security or insecurity of the nation. This is not so much an abstract theory as a generalization determined by the facts; it is the way things happen in the natural course of events. The individual's liberty contracts when the country is threatened and expands when the nation is at peace. This is all obvious. No man of character is going to aim solely at the development of his individuality when the very survival of the nation is at stake. On the other hand, do be sure you see that the individualism I am talking about implies a warning against becoming the kind of fellow who insists on keeping his helmet on even after the fire is out, the man who wants to keep in lockstep when that is no longer necessary.

Here is another example. When I was in higher school, some of the students organized a club. I've forgotten now what they called it and just what its aims were, but the club was a particularly severe advocate of nationalism. There was nothing wrong with this club, of course; it had plenty of support, including that of the school president, Kinoshita Hirotsugu. All of the members wore badges on their chests. I did not intend to wear any badges, but I was made a member nevertheless. Not being one of the club's originators, I knew that many of my opinions were at odds with theirs, but I joined because I had no good reason not to. When it came time for the inaugural meeting in the big lecture hall, one of the students apparently decided that the occasion deserved a speech. I was, to be sure, a member of the club, but there was much in it that conflicted with my opinions, and I recall having strongly attacked its aims. But here, at the opening meeting, everything this fellow had to say was a rebuttal of what I had said! I had no idea if he was doing it on purpose or by coincidence, but in any case, I was going to have to answer him, and when he was through I stepped to the podium. I suppose I handled myself very badly, but at least I said what was on my mind. My remarks were quite simple, and they went something like this:

The nation may well be important, but we cannot possibly concern ourselves with the nation from morning to night as though possessed by it. There may be those who insist that we think of nothing but the nation twenty-four hours a day, but, in fact, no one can go on thinking only of one single thing so incessantly. The bean-curd seller does not go around selling bean curd for the nation's sake. He does it to earn a living. Whatever his immediate motives may be, he does contribute something necessary to society, and in that sense perhaps, the nation benefits indirectly. The same might be said of the fact that I had three bowls of rice today for lunch and four for supper. I took a larger serving not for the nation's sake but, frankly, to suit my stomach. These things might be said to have some very indirect influence on the country, and indeed, from certain points of view, they might bear some relation to the entire drift of world affairs. But what a horror if we had to take that into account and eat for the nation, wash our faces for the nation, go to the toilet for the nation! There is

noting wrong with encouraging nationalism, but to pretend that you are doing all of these impossible things for the nation is simply a lie. This was more or less what I said.

No one—and I do mean no one—is going to be unconcerned about the nation's safety when one's country is in danger. But when the country is strong and the risk of war small, when there is no threat of being attacked from without, then nationalism should diminish accordingly and individualism enter to fill the vacuum. This only stands to reason. We are all aware that Japan today is not entirely secure. Japan is a poor country, and small. Anything could happen at any time. In that sense all of us must maintain our concern for the nation. But this country of ours is in no danger of suddenly collapsing; we are not about to suffer annihilation; and as long as this is true, there should be no need for all the commotion on behalf of the country. It is like running through the streets dressed in firefighting clothes, filled with self-sacrifice, before any fire has even broken out.

Finally, however, this is all a matter of degree. When war does break out, when a crisis involving the nation's survival does arise, anyone with a mind that can think—anyone who has cultivated sufficient character such that he cannot help but think—will naturally turn his attention to it. Nature itself will see to it that he gives his all for the nation, even if this means placing restrictions on his individual liberty and cutting back on personal activity. Thus, I do not for a moment believe that nationalism and individualism are irreconcilable opposites engaged in a constant state of internecine warfare.

I would like to say more on the subject but time does not permit, so I will limit myself to these remarks. There is just one other point that I would like to bring to your attention—namely, that a nationalistic morality comes out a very poor second when compared with an individualistic morality. Nations have always been most punctilious over the niceties of diplomatic language, but not so with the morality of their actions. They swindle and cheat and trick each other every chaotic step of the way. That is why you will have to content yourself with a pretty cheap grade of morality when you take the nation as your standard, when you conceive of the nation as an indivisible monolith. Approach life from a foundation of individualism, however, and you arrive at a far loftier morality; the difference between the two deserves a good deal of thought. To me, therefore, it seems obvious that in a time of tranquillity for the nation, we should place the greater emphasis on individualism with its lofty moral sense. I am afraid I have no time to say anything further on this subject today.

I want to thank you for inviting me here. I have tried my best to explain to you how necessary individualism will be for young men such as yourselves who will have the opportunity to live lives of individual fulfillment, and I have done so in the hope that it might be of some use to you once you have gone out into the world. Whether or not I have, in fact, made myself understood, I of course cannot know, but if there should be points that are still unclear to you,

it is because I have expressed myself insufficiently or poorly. If you do find that something I have said remains vague, please do not assign some random meaning to my words, but come to see me at my home whenever you wish and I will do my best to explain. Of course, nothing could give me greater satisfaction than to have gained your understanding of my true meaning without this extra effort.

"No. Not once," Chin-hua answered without any hesitation, her face glowing as she crunched on the melon seeds in her mouth.

EDOGAWA RANPO

Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965) began writing detective and mystery stories in 1923, the year of the Great Kantō Earthquake, and he usually is credited with being the first such professional writer in Japan. Ranpo's real name was Hirai Tarō; he chose a pen name like that of one of the then most admired and popular of all American writers in Japan, Edgar Allan Poe. Ranpo gained a worldwide reputation for his tales, which often are filled with the erotic and the grotesque. "The Human Chair" (Ningen isu) is one of his early works, having been written in 1925.

THE HUMAN CHAIR (NINGEN ISU)

Translated by James B. Harris

Yoshiko saw her husband off to his work at the Foreign Office at a little past ten o'clock. Then, now that her time was once again her very own, she shut herself up in the study she shared with her husband to resume work on the story she was to submit for the special summer issue of *K*—— magazine.

She was a versatile writer with high literary talent and a smooth-flowing style. Even her husband's popularity as a diplomat was overshadowed by hers as an authoress.

Daily she was overwhelmed with letters from readers praising her works. In fact, this very morning, as soon as she sat down before her desk, she immediately proceeded to glance through the numerous letters which the morning mail had brought. Without exception, in content they all followed the same pattern, but prompted by her deep feminine sense of consideration, she always read through each piece of correspondence addressed to her, whether monotonous or interesting.

Taking the short and simple letters first, she quickly noted their contents. Finally she came to one which was a bulky, manuscript-like sheaf of pages. Although she had not received any advance notice that a manuscript was to be sent to her, still it was not uncommon for her to receive the efforts of amateur writers seeking her valuable criticism. In most cases these were long-winded, pointless, and yawn-provoking attempts at writing. Nevertheless, she now opened the envelope in her hand and took out the numerous, closely written, sheets.

As she had anticipated, it was a manuscript, carefully bound. But somehow, for some unknown reason, there was neither a title nor a byline. The manuscript began abruptly:

"Dear Madam: . . ."

Momentarily she reflected. Maybe after all, it was just a letter. Unconsciously her eyes hurried on to read two or three lines, and then gradually she became absorbed in a strangely gruesome narrative. Her curiosity aroused to the bursting point and spurred on by some unknown magnetic force, she continued to read:

Dear Madam:

I do hope you will forgive this presumptuous letter from a complete stranger. What I am about to write, Madam, may shock you no end. However, I am determined to lay bare before you a confession—my own—and to describe in detail the terrible crime I have committed.

For many months I have hidden myself away from the light of civilization, hidden, as it were, like the devil himself. In this whole wide world, no one knows of my deeds. However, quite recently a queer change took place in my conscious mind, and I just couldn't bear to keep my secret any longer. I simply had to confess!

All that I have written so far must certainly have awakened only perplexity in your mind. However, I beseech you to bear with me and kindly read my communication to the bitter end, because if you do, you will fully understand the strange workings of my mind and the reason why it is to you in particular that I make this confession.

I am really at a loss as to where to begin, for the facts which I am setting forth are all so grotesquely out of the ordinary. Frankly, words fail me, for human words seem utterly inadequate to sketch all the details. But nevertheless, I will try to lay bare the events in chronological order just as they happened.

First, let me explain that I am ugly beyond description. Please bear this fact in mind; otherwise I fear that if and when you do grant my ultimate request and *do* see me, you may be shocked and horrified at the sight of my face—after so many months of unsanitary living. However, I implore you to believe me when I state that despite the extreme ugliness of my face, within my heart there has always burned a pure and overwhelming passion!

Next, let me explain that I am a humble workman by trade. Had I been born into a well-to-do family, I might have found the power, with money, to ease the torture of my soul brought on by my ugliness. Or perhaps if I had been endowed by nature with artistic talents, I might again have been able to forget my bestial countenance and seek consolation in music or poetry. But unblessed with any such talents, and being the unfortunate creature that I am, I had no trade to turn to except that of a humble cabinetmaker. Eventually my specialty became that of making assorted types of chairs.

In this particular line I was fairly successful, to such a degree in fact that I gained the reputation of being able to satisfy any kind of order, no matter how complicated. For this reason, in woodworking circles I came to enjoy the special privilege of accepting only orders for luxury chairs, with complicated requests