

はしがき

本書は日本在住のアメリカ人ジャーナリスト Peter Weld 氏のエッセイを編集した、英語学習用テキストです。Weld 氏は日本人英語学習者のために長年、達意の英文を数多く書いてきました。金星堂出版の教科書第5弾にあたる本書は、一国のレベルでは解決不可能な、グローバルで今日的な問題を扱うものですが、難解な題材が分かりやすくかみ砕かれ、平明な英語で表現されています。良質な英語に触れることができるだけでなく、世界中の人々が共有する諸問題について、知らぬ間に視野を広げることができる本書ほど、英語学習者の助けとなるテキストはないでしょう。

本書ではまず、第1章で世界の人口過剰の問題が取り上げられます。第1章の問題意識は第2、3章の開発途上国における貧困や飢餓の問題と有機的につながり、さらには第4章で提起される「テロリズムはなぜ存在するのか」という問いへも響いていきます。最初の4章で、日本ではあまり日常的に意識されない事象が、実は地球に住む一人一人の生活と切り離せないグローバルな問題であるという、本書全体を通底する問題意識が提示されているのです。グローバル時代の諸問題にアプローチするためには、第5章で取り上げられるインターネットは今や不可欠なツールです。ただし、インターネットに過度に依存することの危険性を指摘することも著者は忘れていません。

第6章で扱われている排他的経済水域をめぐる国家間の争いは、日本でも近年、新聞紙上を賑わせているタイムリーな話題といえます。地球の表面の70パーセント以上は水で覆われ、その97パーセントは海にあるという事実と、しかし安全できれいな飲み水は地球上にごくわずかしかなく、水域をめぐる国家間の争いが激化しているという事実とのギャップに驚く人もいるかもしれません。第7章では、私たちが毎日当然のように使っている水が、世界的にみれば、貴重な天然資源であることが例示されています。

続く第8、9章は消費について考えさせられます。ここでは行き過ぎた消費主義やショッピング熱について皮肉を交えて語られた上で、実はそれらが生態系破壊の一端となっており、ひいては人類が破滅の縁に近づく原因になっていることが暗示されます。第10章で指摘されるように、地球温暖化や気候変動の問題は人間のライフスタイルを変えれば解決する問題

ではありません。しかし、危機を回避するためには、従来の考え方にとらわれない、「柔軟な者」になることが必要だという著者の主張には誰もが納得することでしょう。戦争という、すぐれて人為的な危機を回避するためには、「柔軟な」思考をもつ子供たちに平和的に紛争を解決するための教育を施す必要があるとする第11章の主張も、同じ文脈で理解することができます。

第12、13、14章は、石油枯渇の問題、メディア時代の情報の問題、善意でボランティアや人助けをする際の問題を取り上げていますが、いずれにも真実と虚偽の間で翻弄される今日の私たちの姿を的確に描写しています。そして、「一つの問題の解決に取り組むことがすべての問題を解決する手助けとなる」(第3章) ような「グローバルな問題」を取り上げた本書を総括するのが最終章の第15章です。最後に著者は、世界をより幸せな場所にするためには、あなたの周囲の人々を、そしてあなた自身を幸せにするよう努力しなければならないと述べています。それこそが全編に通底する著者のメッセージなのでしょう。

本書はまた、英語学習者の自発的な学習を促すためのシンプルな問いを用意しています。各章のはじめには各題材への足がかりとして **Warm-up questions** が置かれています。まずはひとりで考えてみるのもいいでしょうし、グループで会話練習をしてみてもいいでしょう。本文のあとの **Exercises** は、I. 本文に出てきた語句の意味を問う設問、II. 内容把握を確認するための設問、III. 題材についてさらに深く考えるための設問、から成り立っています。適宜活用していただければ幸いです。

編注についてはできるだけ簡潔にすることを心がけましたが、箇所によっては、英語面・情報面ともに読者の興味を引くような説明を加えました。また語句説明については、**Exercises I.** の単語については省略したり、あえて英語の定義を使用したものもあります。積極的に辞書を使用し、確認していただければと思います。思わぬところで不備や誤りがあるかとも思います。その際には是非ともご教示いただければ幸いです。

編注者

Foreword

Humans have long dreamed of living in Utopia—a perfect, trouble-free world. Well, here’s a bit of bad news: it will never happen. There always have been problems, and there always will be. That doesn’t mean that we can’t solve those problems, only that we need to be aware that new issues will arise to take the places of the ones we’ve solved. It’s a natural part of life.

Issues of Our Age offers a snapshot of the problems which affect our society today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century. There’s quite a variety: some of these problems have been around for centuries, while others are probably younger than you are. A hundred years from now, a person reading this book—your great-grandchild, perhaps—might be amused by the issues described in it (“Famine? Oh, yeah, I remember hearing about that in my history class”), but you can be sure that he or she will have worries, even if they’re not the same as the ones we have.

Issues of Our Age is my fifth book for Kinseido. Like the earlier ones, it’s not meant to give you a complete, detailed look at each of the topics it covers; that would require far too many pages and too much jargon. Like my earlier books, this one is not meant to tell you what I think the best solutions are. Instead, my aim in writing it is to present you with fresh perspectives on these problems and to try to steer your thoughts in directions which you haven’t considered before. You might decide that these new ways of looking at the world’s dilemmas are not as good as the old ways. That’s fine. The

important thing is to explore as many different approaches to our goal as possible before deciding which approach to take.

I hope that you enjoy *Issues of Our Age*. I hope that it gives you new ideas even about the oldest problems. I hope that it improves your English. And I hope that some day not too long from now we will have resolved most of these issues. Then we'll be able to turn our attention to new issues of a new age.

Peter Weld

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1 Seven Billion and Counting

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How many people live on Earth?

Warm-up questions

- What do you think are some of the problems that overpopulation might cause?
- Do you know any underpopulated areas in Japan?

A centimeter is about as wide as your fingernail, but seven billion centimeters equals more than one-and-a-half trips around the globe. A second goes by in the blink of an eye, but seven billion seconds? That's over two hundred twenty years! There's no denying it: seven billion is a big number. 5

In 2011, the United Nations announced that the world's

population had exceeded seven billion people. Of course, nobody really knows exactly how many human beings live on this planet; most developed countries count their citizens in a census every five or ten years and get a pretty
5 good headcount—though not a perfect one—but developing countries often don't have anything better than a general idea of their population. Nonetheless, even if the seven billion figure was actually reached a few years before 2011 or is still a few years away, it's roughly accurate, and there's no denying
10 it: seven billion is a lot of people.

So much has been written about Japan's low birth rate and declining population that it's easy to overlook the fact that the world's population continues to grow. Japan is not the only country in which the population is leveling off or even
15 going down; Germany, Singapore, and South Korea are among the other nations in that situation. At the opposite end of the spectrum are countries such as Niger, Mali, and Burundi, where the average woman bears six or seven children during her lifetime—and where hunger, poverty, and disease are all
20 parts of everyday life for many.

Do you see the irony in that last paragraph? In the wealthy countries, where most people could afford to have more children if they wanted to, fertility rates are actually quite low; meanwhile in the poor countries many people have
25 to struggle just to survive from one day to the next—but they continue to have more children.

You can surely understand that high birth and fertility rates tend to result in a low standard of living because a family's resources (and the nation's resources as a whole) have

to be divided among more people, leaving a smaller share for each person. But is it possible that the opposite is also true—that a low standard of living results in high birth and fertility rates?

Yes, it certainly is. A rich farmer can hire people to work ⁵ for him, but a poor farmer can't. If he needs more people to work on his farm, he'll probably think that his only choice is to have more children because he doesn't have to pay them wages in exchange for their help—and the same is true for a shop owner in a city. Furthermore, wealthy people have more ¹⁰ safe, effective options when it comes to family planning and can afford to send their children to schools, where they're more likely to learn about the dangers of overpopulation.

What we have then is a vicious circle: a low standard of living leading to more babies, which means more mouths ¹⁵ to feed and therefore a lower standard of living. Clearly we have to break this cycle. The world's population has more than doubled in the last fifty years, and if it continues to grow at that rate, a hundred years from now there will be nearly ²⁰ thirty billion people packed onto the Earth.

How can we break the cycle? There is no one simple answer; if there were, the problem would have been solved long ago. Rather we'll have to try a variety of approaches, in the hope that each of them will help a little and all of them ²⁵ collectively will bring us to a solution. For example, people in developing countries need to be provided with access to reliable methods of birth control at reasonable costs. But for birth control to be effective, people have to want to use it and know how to use it properly, and that's where improved

education is necessary: in schools and at the community level, teachers and health workers will need to explain persuasively how much more comfortable life can be with a smaller population.

5 Improving the developing world's health services requires money. Improving the developing world's educational system requires money. And money is one of the things that the developing countries don't have much of. Where will the funding for these improvements come from? From foreign aid
10 provided by developed nations? There's another bit of irony: many developed countries are busy spending their money to try to get their own birth rates to go *up*!

 The funding has to come from somewhere, and it has to come soon because there are too many reasons why we need
15 to slow and then stop the world's population growth—in fact, more than seven billion reasons.

Exercises

I. Write the Japanese that corresponds to each English word or phrase.

- (1) developed countries (p.2 1.3) ⇒
- (2) census (p.2 1.4) ⇒
- (3) overlook (p.2 1.12) ⇒
- (4) nonetheless (p.2 1.7) ⇒
- (5) struggle (p.2 1.25) ⇒

II. Choose the best answer.

- (1) Which of the following statements is NOT true?
 - (a) Most developed countries count their citizens in a census every five or ten years.
 - (b) The U.N. announced that the world population had exceeded seven billion people.
 - (c) The developing countries have an accurate grasp of their population.
- (2) In such countries as Germany, Singapore, and South Korea, the population has started to
 - (a) decrease
 - (b) increase
 - (c) explode
- (3) According to the essay, funding to help the developing countries
 - (a) should come from the countries themselves.
 - (b) should come as slowly as possible.
 - (c) should come as soon as possible.

III. After reading, think about these questions.

- (1) What do you think about the declining population in Japan? Do you have any ideas about how to get Japan's birth rate to go up?
- (2) How might the world's overpopulation as a whole affect your life in the future?