

たじみん昼話 123

具体は捨てて抽象を拾って答えよ。その1

今回は、物理的に変な某大学の入試問題を紹介する。解答を考えて欲しい。国語でも英語でも字数制限を設けて要約せよという問題はよく出題される。これは細かい情報に惑わされず本質を見抜く力があるかを試している。問題が要求しているのは、次の英文の要約を70~90字で解答せよだ。

Some years ago, on a journey to America, I passed the time by asking my fellow passengers to answer some rather strange questions. The first was: 'Which seems to you the larger, an elephant or a second? After explaining that I meant a second of time and not a second elephant, I then tried to find out what sort of length of time people would consider equal to the size of an elephant. One man was a physicist. He insisted that the second must be equal to the distance travelled by light during that interval of time which is much larger than an elephant, of course. But most other people voted for the elephant, though there were wide differences in the selection of a time suitable to compare with it. Why would most people feel sure that an elephant is larger than a second? Presumably because we think of an elephant as larger than most animals we know, and seconds are smaller than most of the time intervals with which we are concerned. What we are really saying is that an elephant is large for an animal and a second is small as time goes. So we instinctively compare unlike objects by relating them to the average size of their kin.

考え方のヒント 2つ

①70~90字でまとめるのだから、個別具体的な内容は捨て抽象を拾おう。

②おっ、と印象に残ったセンテンスを拾おう。

思考の流れ:ゾウと1秒ではどちらが大きいと思う?という奇妙な問い
→多くの者はゾウと答えた →その理由は、私たちは異質なもの同士を比較するとき、夫々の大きさを同質類型の平均値と関連づけて判断するからだ。

具体的な話に目を奪われてはいけない。この文章の本質をズバリ見抜こう。