

Newsletter No.9

*Construction of
Death and Life Studies
Concerning Value and Culture of Life*

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"Journal of Death and Life Studies"(vol.5, Spring, 2005) Index

A decorative border of stylized, overlapping leaf patterns in shades of gray surrounds the title and author's name.

Death and Infinity

Shogo Takegawa

By some freak of fate, I became a member of the organization of the COE Program, the “Construction of Death and Life Studies”. Needless to say, I am a complete amateur in the field of Death and Life Studies. Yet, the team for the “Investigation of the Perspective on Human Beings as an Expression of Life Activities” came to take up the subject of nursing care, and I believe it was the Program Leader who thought of targeting me, feeling the need to include a sociological perspective on the subject.

In the days when I began my research in sociology, when one typed in the letters of “Kaigo (which also means ‘nursing care’)”, the only character compound that the word processor came up with was “Kaigo (remorse)” and so I cannot but help approach the topic of nursing care, which has now become a subject of academic research in the humanities, with a sense of the past. However, I do not intend to write about this now. For, in our COE symposium held last year (Perspectives on Death and Life and the Actuality of Providing Care, Section 1 “Issues of Care, Education and Culture of Living and Dying”) in which I participated as a speaker, the things that triggered most debate were to be seen in an entirely different place.

The report of this event by Professor Tadashi Nishihira of the Faculty of Education, prompted me to recall various things about that time. Professor Nishihira described the subtle internal conflict experienced by those in their infancy and childhood by drawing on recollections and memoirs of students, and among them were also references to “the fear of death” and “the fear of infinity”. When I read this, the fragment of my memory, which had hitherto lay in oblivion, surfaced to my conscious mind.

Death is often understood in connection to adolescence. The suicide figures are high among both the elderly and youth. It is generally thought that to ponder about life and death is a characteristic of adolescence. However, as was the case in the examples in Professor Nishihira’s report, it was not during adolescence but in childhood that I was most strongly aware of death in my life thus far. At one phase during that time, I was seized by such an indescribable fear of death that I had trouble sleeping. I thought this was due to a personal weakness and so for some time, I did not tell anyone about it. Yet later, I met several people who had shared a similar experience, again, not in junior or senior high school, but in their primary school years. One of them, in fact, had told his friend about his fear of death, and therefore instead of worrying about it alone, was able to experience mutual consolation.

I was thinking such thoughts at my seat at the symposium, and realized that in my case, this kind of fear was traceable all the way back to my infancy. That fear is not of death, but better described as the fear of infinity. Assuming that the universe is infinite, you think of riding on a spaceship and wonder seriously what would happen if you just kept on going. In the end, you realize that there is no answer, and this thought incites a tremble of fear. This took place in infancy. This too, I had attributed to the unique experience based in my individual peculiarity, but during the questions and answers at the

symposium when there was reference to “the fear of infinity in infancy”, I was taken aback to find out that there was another person who also shared a similar experience.

It is said that the most philosophical period in one’s life is one’s adolescence. This is explained by the fact that the adolescent worries about love, about sex and about his or her career. Yet, I wonder if this is really the case. Couldn’t we say that, in the sense that those in their infancy and childhood approach existential questions directly, they are in fact quite philosophical? Or perhaps psychological development is also reflection of the process of ontogeny repeating phylogeny?



Bioethics and Differences between Inter-faculty Tribes

Satoshi Kodama

There is a story about Gyges' ring in Plato’s *Republic*, about whether one should not commit wrongs even when one can become invisible due to the ring. Cicero referred to this story in his essay “On Duty”, and said that “one strain of philosophers who are not particularly erudite or eminent” fail to understand the meaning of this story, and instead criticize the “the given hypothetical condition (ie. the condition that no one would know what one does) as impossible”, not even attempting to address the issue at stake.

The same thing happens in the Bioethics classes that my colleagues and I teach at the Medical Faculty. For instance, when Thomson’s example of the violinist is taken up in class, sometimes the debate never even takes off because the students say that since the very hypothesis is impossible, it is not worth debating. Even regarding Harris’ “survival lottery”, I get comments like “What’ the point of learning such fancies?” To draw you a caricature, many of the medical tribes-people (among them are not only students but also those from the “site of practice” who are taking the course designed for working people) feel the need for an immediate solution as to “what should be done”, and therefore, instead of learning the processes of thinking and deduction, they seek to produce the solution, which in fact should be the product of those processes. This kind of attitude is blatantly exemplified by the fact that classes in medical law and risk management, which can be immediately useful at the site of practice, are more popular than Bioethics, which is speculative and where no one clear answer can be found. They think that rather than learning the theories of Thomson and Harris, which can only be useful as a topic of conversation at the drinking table, they would prefer learning some judicial precedents or ethical guidelines which have more practical use. A medical tribesperson, who has read *Gorgias*, may be inclined to persuade a Humanities tribesperson in the following words: “For heaven’s sake, take rest from philosophy and do something more important.”

Another thing to bear in mind is that at the Medical Faculty, generally time flows faster than at the Faculty of Humanities. Most of the Medical papers are about a page to several pages, and regarding the length of presentations at conferences, 20 minutes is on the longer side including question time. On the other hand, a Philosophical paper is usually a few dozen pages, and presentations at conferences often go on for 40

minutes or more. Also it is common that academic Medical journals are published monthly. To go off on a tangent, the Western periodicals prior to 1980 in the Medical Library at Hongo were relocated to Kashiwa Campus Library at the end of last year, but such a thing would be unthinkable in the Humanities. It may be an exaggeration to liken the two to an elephant and a mouse, but in any case, there is a clear difference in the passage of time between the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Medicine.

In this way, the temperament of the two faculties is quite different. If I may caricature the situation again, the tribesmen in the Humanities raise questions, but don't place much emphasis on the process leading to their solution and do not mind even if they cannot solve the problems immediately. On the contrary, the Medical faculty tribesmen emphasize results, and desire a solution at any rate, even if it's a provisional one. Bioethics, which is an interdisciplinary field of study, is a forum where people of different academic backgrounds can come together—that is, where octopuses, each out of their respective octopus jar, can interact with one another, to use a Japanese vulgarism. Whether they are tribes-people from the Humanities, Law or Economics, they all have to make efforts to facilitate a smooth communication between their respective fields. For example, those from the Medical Faculty should examine the theories of Thomson and Harris and should look at, and at times even question, their own ethical intuition and thinking process they have currently. Also, the Humanities tribes-people should make a constant effort to bring their theories closer to practice, and adapting to the impatient Medical Faculty tribes-people, should not only point out the problem at stake, but also endeavor to find solutions. Only when this inter-tribal mutual understanding, tolerance and coming together are nurtured, will the academic field of Bioethics establish and develop itself as a truly interdisciplinary area of research.



**Professor Iwao Hirose's Lecture and Workshop,
"Aggregation of Individuals and its Restriction"**

Masaki Ichinose

At 4pm on 8 April 2005, Professor Iwao Hirose's Lecture and Workshop "Aggregation of Individuals and its Restriction" was held at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo. It was early in the new semester, but perhaps due to the wide advertising, there were about thirty participants from various academic fields. Professor Iwao Hirose is a young Japanese scholar of Ethics and Theories of Justice, who, having completed his studies at the University of St Andrews, is now a College Fellow at Oxford University in the UK. I became acquainted with Professor Hirose when I was at Oxford on overseas research, and this Lecture and Workshop came about due to the fact that it so happened he was making a temporary trip back to Japan in April.

Now, at this Lecture and Workshop, Professor Hirose spoke about examining a counterargument to the line of thinking that he called "Aggregation of Individuals", which determines the right and wrong of moral judgment by aggregating the moral values

of numerous individuals. As is immediately apparent, to oppose this line of thinking, means none other than to criticize utilitarianism. Yet, Professor Hirose checked his theory against consequentialism, which is implied in utilitarianism, and pointing out that the aggregation of individuals and consequentialism do not equal each other, argued that to criticize the aggregation of individuals is to criticize utilitarianism, but that the reverse does not hold. From this standpoint, he looked at the theories of two contemporary ethicists, Rawls and Scanlon and presented a thorough rebuttal to them. That is, he demonstrated that a criticism of utilitarianism from a Rawlsian perspective, which emphasizes the autonomy of individuals, does not necessary lead to a criticism of the aggregation of individuals, and that Scanlon's criticism of the aggregation of individuals from his own contractualist perspective, carries an inconsistency. Finally, Professor Hirose took up Amartya Sen's theory which claims that when the slight moral disadvantages of individual women are aggregated and tallied in the whole world, there emerges a situation where the female population is less than what it is expected to be, that is, a state of "missing women", and concluded that there is no reason to exclude the "aggregation of individuals" line of thinking from a moral viewpoint. It was a very stimulating lecture committed to an up-to-date debate, and a lively discussion ensued in the question time. Particularly, since there was extensive usage of seemingly tricky hypothetical examples, questions centered on the status of an argument based on such examples. Professor Hirose answered that in order to examine moral principles, it is necessary to hypothesize an 'ideal type' of situation, particularly in order to elucidate the central issues at stake. I too asked him a question regarding whether the idea of 'aggregating individuals' involves a principle of determining this population base, since one must determine the scope of aggregation when speaking of aggregation, or when collecting data, the population base from which to collect that data in order to make the research meaningful. What I had in mind was the situation where the aggregation results and moral judgment would be clearly different between when the values of American conservatives regarding American dispatch of troops to Iraq are aggregated, and when those of Iraqi citizens are aggregated. Professor Hirose responded that, this problem had to be discussed separately, and that the "aggregation of individuals" in itself does not end the moral debate. In this way, the lecture and workshop was very meaningful and rich in content. Afterwards, a number of participants went out to have dinner with Professor Hirose and continued the discussion further. It seemed that the students found his lecture very enlightening, and no doubt they were highly stimulated and inspired by meeting a professor such as Iwao Hirose, a fellow Japanese who is playing an active role in the academic life of Oxford. I felt that our initiative to construct "Death and Life Studies" attained yet another depth from this lecture and workshop.



Two Lectures by Professor Tu Weiming

Susumu Shimazono

Professor Tu Weiming, who joined us at the 21st Century COE program "Death and Life Studies" as a Special Visiting Professor, took part in stimulating exchanges between Japanese researchers at numerous academic gatherings. Here, I'd like to report

on two of his lectures. The first is a lecture entitled “Confucian Self-examination in light of Enlightenment Thought” (hereafter referred to as the “Enlightenment” lecture) which took place at the Komaba Campus of Tokyo University on 4 April, in collaboration with the 21st Century COE “University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy” at the School of Arts and Sciences. The second is a lecture entitled “Religious Self-Examination regarding the Creational Development of Confucian Humanism” (hereafter referred to as the “Religious Self-examination” lecture), which was held at the Tokyo campus of the University of Tsukuba in Otsuka on 7 April, in collaboration with the Philosophy Research Group of Tsukuba University. The former was conducted in English, and the latter, in Chinese with simultaneous Chinese-Japanese interpretation.

The “Enlightenment” lecture supposed an audience sympathetic to Western thought. Professor Tu Weiming takes Confucianism as a system of thought with a strong this-worldly emphasis, which is reserved when it comes to excessive otherworldly concerns. Confucianism does not anticipate a world after death, nor does it give weight to the idea of “eternal life”. In this sense, Professor Tu Weiming claims, Confucianism is Humanism and includes many aspects that correspond to Enlightenment thought. However, that is not to say that it takes a human-centric position, which values the secular for the sake of it being secular. He claims that, the view of Confucianism as something that consolidates existing power structures and this-worldly order is mistaken. To interpret Confucianism as that which primarily oppresses human rights, is to misconceive the very core of Confucianism. That is, the Enlightenment criticism towards Confucianism does not hold. Not only does Confucianism meet the demands of Enlightenment philosophy, but it also surpasses it. If contemporary Western ideology is at an impasse due to its inability to overcome limits of the Enlightenment, then Confucianism can provide what is lacking in Enlightenment thought, as well as contribute to a new global ideological paradigm.

In his “Religious Self-examination” lecture, Professor Tu Weiming supposed an audience sympathetic to Chinese thought, and spoke of the significance of Confucian philosophy in the contemporary world. Confucianism tends to be seen as an educational ideology for social ethics, but in fact, it goes beyond the scope of ethics to a dimension that transcends this world. It claims that the accomplishment of good character not only has a bearing at the family and national dimension, but also at the cosmic dimension. Confucianism is supposed to give weight to the problems of life and death, while at the same time, refusing to make light of social realities, and has its point of reference in “Heaven”, that is, in transcendence. Conversely, its transcendental philosophy is always rooted in the earthly and physical dimension. It is this philosophical structure of Confucianism that Mencius (Mengzi) accurately expressed when he said, “Look into thy heart and know thy nature and Heaven”. Here, aesthetics, ethics and religion are all one, and as H. Fingarette highlighted, Confucianism is a system of thought which teaches that “the sacred can be reached through the secular”. It seeks to deal with four inseparable dimensions—the self, the community, nature and Heavenly Way—and this religious character of Confucianism, which treats heaven and earth and everything in between holistically, is unique among various religions of the world, and could break new ground by holding dialogues with other civilizations.

Professor Tu Weiming's lecture sought to overturn 1) the view of Confucianism as a defender of traditional morals that emphasize hierarchical social relations, and 2) the assumption that Confucianism is lacking in a religious dimension and is primarily concerned with this-worldly social order and human relations; and argued that Confucianism was a) a system of thought that is in line with the concepts of freedom and equality, while at the same time, able to overcome the deadlock experienced by modern Western ideology, and b) a system of thought that has a transcendental dimension, while refusing to succumb to viewing the human being as an independent self-conscious subject and instead, seeing the human being as situated in exchanges with others and the world. He focused on the positive possibilities of Confucianism in the contemporary context, and indicated that this is the direction in which we can hope for religion to develop. Yet, would he not be leaving much of Confucianism as it actually exists unexplained by putting Confucianism forward as a contemporary ideology? Further, are there really prospects for this kind of scholarly-directed ideological movement to reactivate contemporary Chinese civilization? Questions along these lines were directed to him and a vivacious discussion followed. If the symposium held on 23 April, "Life and Death in Confucianism", dealt head-on with the issues of Death and Life Studies, then the discussions in these two lectures questioned the very premise of understanding life and death in Confucianism, that is, the contemporary and practical understanding of Confucianism.



**Professor Tu Weiming's Lecture,
"A Preliminary Examination into the Zisi and Mengzi School"**

Tsuyoshi Kojima

On 14 April from 1-3pm, at Room 215 in Building 1 of the Faculty of Letters, there took place a lecture by Professor Tu Weiming where approximately 30 people attended.

As stated in the title, this lecture gave an overview preliminary coverage of the school of thought by Zisi (the grandson of Confucius) and Mengzi. As Sima Qian stated in *Records of the Grand Historian*, in the Confucian tradition, it is said that Mengzi learnt from the disciple of Zisi. However, modern philology came to deem that due to the lack of objectivity to this claim, the work of *Zhongyong* (The Doctrine of the Mean), which was thought to be that of Zisi, was in fact produced in an era after Mengzi, and thus not directly connected to Zisi himself at all. Yet, in more recent years, due to the fact that a tomb thought to date back to the end of fourth century BC was excavated in Guodian (郭店) along with works that relate to the content of *Zhongyong*, this problem of genealogy is once again under review. Professor Tu Weiming's lecture introduced the details of this debate and stated his own opinions on interpreting Mengzi's thought.

After the lecture, Li Shengli, a specialist in research concerning excavated literatures at Guodian (also a full-time lecturer at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology) raised some questions regarding the age of the tomb. In his reply, Professor Tu

Weiming showed understanding towards Professor Li's view and said that there is need for a serious examination of the lack of agreement between the age estimation by archaeologists and the genealogical framework of historians of thought.

On the day of the lecture, the Chinese-Japanese interpreter, Shigeo Hirose (a postgraduate student at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology) who is also a specialist on this topic, delivered a fluent, easily understandable interpretation. Due to the class hours, there was not enough time for questions in the lecture room, however, thereafter, we transferred to the room of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature in the Akamon General Research Building and held a tea party surrounding Professor Tu Weiming. There, some heated discussion took place as postgraduate students majoring in Philosophy and Literature raised questions and Professor Tu Weiming answered them painstakingly one by one. The tea party came to a close at 5pm.

**The Key Note Address of Professor Tu Weiming at the World Congress of the
International Association for the History of Religions:
A Case of COE Research**
Tsuyoshi Kojima

Professor Tu Weiming, who has been invited by our COE program, Death and Life Studies, is extensively involved in issues regarding religious views of life and death in various civilizations and their conflict and fusion with contemporary currents of thought. In particular, as he is the leading scholar actively taking up the challenge of reassessing the essential value of Confucianism from a contemporary perspective, he is a most suitable candidate for strengthening our understanding of life and death vis-à-vis East Asian philosophy—an area of which thus far, our program has been unable to devote thorough treatment—and we anticipate that he will contribute much to our COE program.

In the religion and philosophy section of our COE program, we have been emphasizing two sets of problems until now. The first set of problems relate to the incredible developments of science and technology and their impact on the moments of birth and life closure, and the second set of problems relate to the challenges faced by traditional religious thought in coming to terms with contemporary challenges. Professor Tu Weiming, who we invited from abroad, is a researcher involved in the second problem area, and he is the second such visiting professor to join us at Death and Life Studies, following the visit of Professor Hillel Levine (from Boston University) the year before last.

During his just over two-week stay in Japan so far, his first contribution has been to deliver a keynote address at the Opening Symposium on the first day of the World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions held in Tokyo this year from 24-30 March. This International Congress was organized under the leadership of Professor Shimazono, Congress Secretariat as well as the chief representative of our COE Program and President of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies. The overarching theme of the conference was “Religion: Conflict and Peace” and at our Opening Symposium on the first day, we asked four intellectuals to deliver a keynote address on the theme of “Religions and Dialogue among Civilizations” among which

Professor Tu Weiming was one.

The title of Professor Tu Weiming's address was "Towards Dialogical Civilization: Religious Leaders as Public Intellectuals". In this address, he proposed that various leaders of established and traditional religions share a mission to further mutual dialogue by going beyond the confines of their traditional religious community to take a stance on contemporary problems, and to speak up in public with a responsible attitude. He calls the people who bear this role, "public intellectuals" and says that if religious leaders who are directly connected with the people take on this role, then a mutual understanding can be fostered between communities at the grassroots level and individual self-cultivation can be promoted. Through this, Professor Tu Weiming aims to realize a state of coexistence at the global level where diversity is given due recognition by all sides.

From a Death and Life Studies perspective, Professor Tu Weiming's conceptions put forward interesting and pioneering points. Most of all his reappraisal of the earthly world bears mention. Originally, the religious leader relativized the earthly world and pointed to the source of existential value and essential religious metaphysics in a place that transcends this world. For example, religion has based itself on such ideas as transcendence, eternity, the infinite, the next life or afterlife, heaven and eternal life. However, for such leaders to take on roles as public intellectuals, new contemporary values would need to be recognized as something essential. These values would be things such as "the sanctity of earth", "dignity of the human family", and "the intrinsic value of life in this earthly world".

It was as if he was positively demonstrating that, no matter what religion we adhere to, so long as we live together on this earth as human beings, there must be values that we hold in common. Perhaps this is something that can only be argued as a contemporary Confucian. Yet, endless questions still remain. Are such values really so universal as to restrict the transcendence of religion? How are we to determine the actual content of these values? From where do they derive in the first place? How will the respective values of each religion reach an accommodation with each other?



**Professor Neal Krause's Lecture and Workshop,
"Religion, Aging and Health"**

Megumi Kaneko and Akiyama Hiroko

That the body and mind is deeply connected is long known, but in recent years, there is a growing tide of interdisciplinary research, centralizing in Europe and the US, on how to scientifically investigate the influence of religion upon people's health. Landmark findings are reported one after the other by various pioneering research, such as on the mechanism of the alleviating effect of religion on health of the elderly who often experience a diminution in physical functions, social roles, and human relationships; the numerous functions of religion in the process of dealing with stress; the benefit of involving religious specialists with patients during times of treatment, including operation, as well as during convalescence. Such results draw the attention not only of the researcher

him- or herself, but also of those in a wide range of disciplines such as medicine, welfare and education. Recently in Japan as well, there is an increased interest in religion and spirituality. In May this year, we will have a talk by Professor Neal Krause who has been researching the relationship between religion and health for quite a number of years.

Professor Krause is currently a lecturer at the Department of Public Health at the University of Michigan, and he holds a concurrent post as a Research Professor in the Institute of Gerontology at the same university. His research is on the relationship between stress, health and religion in old age, and he is a leading scholar in this area. His series of researches have received a grant from the National Institute of Aging in the US. Further, Professor Krause is also well-versed in the situation of the elderly in Japan, being a member of the “panel team”, a collaborative effort which has been going on over the past 18 years since 1987 between the University of Michigan and the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology.

At his lecture and workshop, Professor Krause will speak about the trends in research on religion and health in Europe and the US as well as on the problems and challenges entailed in undertaking such research in Japan.

The details of the lecture and workshop are as follows:

Theme: “Religion, Aging and Health”

Time: 17:00-18:30 o'clock, Tuesday, 31 May 2005

Place: Hongo Campus, University of Tokyo, Hobun Building 2, Lecture Hall 1.

Lecturer: Professor Neal Krause (interpretation available)

For more information, see: www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/shiseigaku

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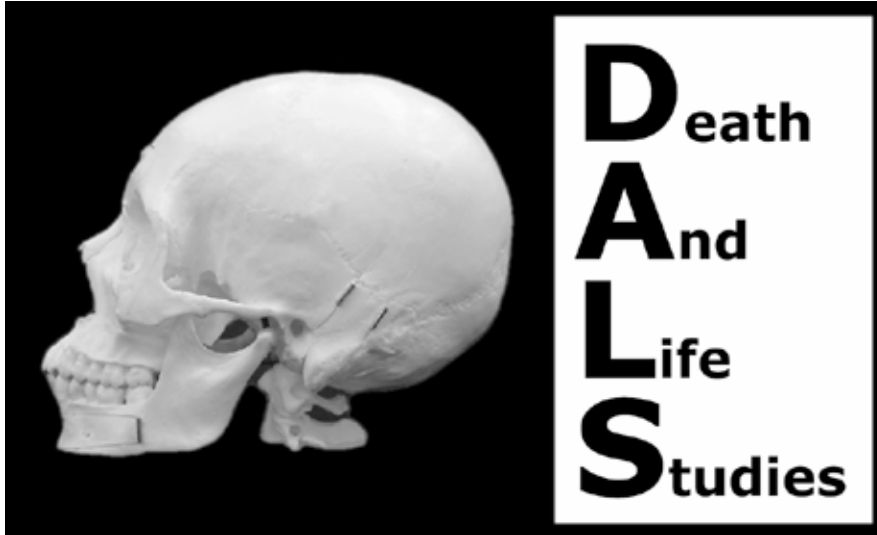
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21st century COE program

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