

## **Newsletter No.11**

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

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## A Box for Everyone?

Miyako Takahashi (Assistant, Faculty of Medicine, Health Sciences)

**“I hope that people aren't categorized merely through knowledge and learning”**

This is what I was told some 10 years ago while conducting an interview with a woman who was undergoing therapy for breast cancer. At the time, I had just entered graduate school. After having worked for ten years in internal medicine, I wanted to study how personal psychology, and social and culture elements affected medical care. Having once again become a student, I first wanted to examine something that had been of interest to me while I worked in the hospital: the role that interaction between patients plays in affecting mental and physical states. Thus, I began my fieldwork, and soon came to deal with these patients from a perspective completely different from that which I once held in the examination room.

The quote above is from a woman who had undergone surgery some five years prior to our interview. She spoke about mental care as performed by professionals.

If (the specialist) is a good human being, then I think such a specialization is good....unfortunately, many of these specialists tend to rely more and more on clinical knowledge when the patient's needs and problems are grave....Just because a patient has a specific and definable disease, each one is different [in their needs]. I wish that they wouldn't be so sure in saying “This patient goes into this category here, and this one goes here.” Even if the specialist has to perform such categorization of the patient, that can be done later. For the time that the patient is opening up and discussing their own problems, I wish that they would give us their personal attention.

Several years ago I remembered this woman's statement as I was reading Arthur W Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. Frank writes that when one speaks of illness—what he calls a “restitution narrative”—it is hoped, by those in medicine and society at large, that such an act will lead to recovery. Fundamentally, it is hoped that the patient can say “Today I am but sick; but tomorrow I will no doubt be better.” Behind this hope is the belief that pharmaceuticals and treatment exists for all disease and illness. Of course, and this is obvious, there are cases when the powerlessness of treatment and the professional is revealed, as seen in when one approaches death and when chronic disabilities remain [despite treatment]. Frank explains that speaking this restitution narrative is seen as an intermediary and way of re-interpreting illness when other means fail. Through this, the patient's experience is able to be dealt with by the the medical professional; what remains outside of this approach, however, is virtually non-existent for the professional.

For example, by having a doctor label a patient as being “depressed” there



is the possibility of offering a clinical diagnosis (the question of the efficacy of such treatment aside). Although what I was told in that interview some 10-years prior differs in terms of how it was phrased, it is surprisingly close to what Frank has pointed out. And I think it is a piercing view of how medical professionals think. When these professionals consider the mental well-being of patients, even before they face the individual in question, they often think: “This person is depressed; this person has an adjustment disorder” and so forth. Are they not placing all of these people into clinically prepared categories, or “boxes”? For those who are given a box and yet don't seem to find the right fit, the danger that they will be placed in an endless series of these categorizations exists. Even those who cannot be helped by clinical intervention are placed in a box: the box for those do not fit into any other. And one wonders if [having been placed there] they will fade from the view of the practitioner. Or, perhaps, for those facing death, are they too not consigned to a specific box?

When I began working in a hospital after graduation, what first dismayed me was that there are diseases and medical conditions in which, no matter what kind of treatment one uses, death is unavoidable. Looking back on my courses in medical school, most ended with discussing the symptoms of various diseases and illnesses and forms of treatments. That some diseases and illnesses cannot be cured was a fact only briefly mentioned, and I soon found myself, without even knowing it, taking part in the process of simply categorizing diseases and illnesses. Although I was displeased with how I had come to take such an optimistic stance, it was several years before I could realize that not all questions have answers; and realizing that there is not only a single answer. Today, I think I have finally realized this fact, and realized that I wish I had learned this sooner.



### **Book Review: Julia Kristeva, *Visions Capitales***

(Translated by Moriyuki Hoshino-Masanori Tsukamoto)

(2005, Misuzu-shobō)

Isao Fukushima (Researcher of COE Project, French Literature)

It would be nice if I could begin this review by saying that the scene of decapitation, of the severed head, is a thing of the past for us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Unfortunately, reality will not allow for such an oversimplification. We are well aware that decapitation was used as a means of killing in the ethnic conflicts in Kosovo and Rwanda; a young Japanese hostage, as well, was “liquidated” by the same means in Iraq. We are also faced with the incomprehensible fact that a (partial) video of his decapitation scene was available on the Internet. Decapitation, then, is not some odd and barbarian custom that has faded from human history; even now, somewhere in the world perhaps, it continues.



From the perspective of an efficient method of killing, however, one wonders why this rather inefficient means is still employed. But decapitation is an act that cannot simply be explained through the goal of taking the life of another. That capital punishment through decapitation was one of the most effective means of maintaining the political spectacle is an example of this fact. Although the invention of the modern guillotine may have left people with the impression that decapitation was merely “like a cool breeze passing through the neck muscles” and, ironically, evinced an ethical concern for those facing capital punishment, we can also imagine that the existence of a machine that could lop off heads of people one after another also caused much fear.

*Terreur*, the regime of fear, was a political system based on the excess of the decapitation. Terrorism, which shares an etymological connection, is the same. When we consider the historical situation behind which this occurred, the diagrammatic and visual nature of Kristeva's work *Visions Capitales* can perhaps be seen as being odd and unsettling. But those who have been possessed by the scene of decapitation are not all in favor of such acts. Rather, those who gaze at the scene of a beheading are not always staring at the scene itself. What Kristeva's gaze (she says that “she cannot draw her eyes from the decapitated head”) continues to see, rather than the image of a beheading, is her own (and ours as well) inner self.

To borrow the words of Régis Michel in the introduction to this book, part of the Louvre Museum's *Parti-pris* exhibition series, this exhibition aimed to confront the ossification of art ideology. This exhibition series, through inviting guest speakers known for their unique ways of speaking, was designed to “create a critical within the museum—the system—itself.” This work is a catalog of an exhibition planned by Kristeva herself, and through her comments one can read the desire, fear, and pain of loss as seen in the scene of decapitation. Still, why should we focus on decapitation, on the human head?

The examples Kristeva presents from the memory of Western culture are brutal without end: the worship of the skull in the Paleolithic period, the decapitation of the Gorgon Medusa by Perseus, the face of Christ in the Shroud of Turin, the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod and his daughter Salome, the beheading of Goliath by David, the decapitation of Holofernes by Judith....However, through Kristeva's knowledge and brooding reflections, this reoccurring theme can be seen as being a specific trope—and a deeply-seated one at that—of the West, if not of humanity itself.

Why are we attracted to such a scene? Kristeva avoids a simple answer, but what we can read here is what we could call a faith in images: the belief in the cathartic power of representation. When infants first experience a feeling of loss, and before they can substitute this loss with words and images, they often go through a period of grief and sadness, what Melanie Klein referred to as the depressive position.

While relying on such an interpretation, Kristeva holds that it is through the recovery of that which is lost through words and images that one can escape from such depressive sadness and change loss into rebirth. However, this act of representation, in that it is transformed into human-made words and images, may not allow for an escape from the act of murder. Essentially, grief and melancholy are



part and parcel of such an act.

That the scene of decapitation was chosen for this work shows how the act of representation has a certain murder-like nature: a metaphor for the separated head and the image obtained. What we must not forget, however, is that symbolic decapitation makes possible the very human world of representative space. This is an “alchemy which turns grief, resignation, castration, and death into representation.” And it is through these images that we may not only find liberation from despair, but also by which complex and mutual human communication is possible; and perhaps has already even allowed us to avoid countless cases of violence.

But does such violence not persist in reality? Of course. However, it is only through the ability to move to representative space—our most fundamental human capacity—by which this chain of violence can be stopped.



## **Funerary Rites and Burial Practices in Contemporary Japan**

**Susumu Shimazono (COE Program Chair, Faculty of Letters, Religious Studies)**

Funerary rites and burial practices are like a mirror that reflects the hearts and minds of contemporary society. Originally, these practices were based on the sending off of the dead. From the end of the 20th Century in Japan, however, new forms of funerary and burial practices have been sought, and there have been many attempts at changing these practices. Notably, attempts at allowing those who have yet to die decide how their posthumous fate should be noted. One of the earliest attempts (beginning in 1990) at allowing the living to decide their own fates (i.e., the so-called “right to self-determination concerning death”) is the Moyai no kai (the Moyai group—Tokyo, Toyoshima Ward) and their contractual system concerning the wishes of the dead.

On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the main figure in this movement, Nyokai Matsushima, visited the University of Tokyo and a discussion on the process of contemporary mortuary and funerary rituals was held. Although the Construction of Death and Life Studies program has held several forums concerning funerary rites and the commemoration of the dead, this forum offered a new perspective on the contemporary culture of living and dying, as Matsushima shared with us his experiences of and understanding concerning these practices at the practical (i.e., what we could call praxis) and day-to-day level.

Matsushima began by explaining the founding of his organization and the unique characteristics of the system it employs. He also discussed the motives and feelings of those who have joined the Moyoi no kai. This was followed by comments from three scholars: Kōichi Kabayama, former chair of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo and scholar of European history, an expert on European funerary and mortuary practices; Makoto Ohara, former professor at Aoyama Gakuin University, who offered his opinions on the notion of the “Good death” from a Christian perspective; and Fumihiko Sueki, professor in the Department of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies at the University of Tokyo, who is strongly interested in the notion of respect for the dead.





Many opinions were offered on the state of contemporary Japanese funerary practices. Notably that traditional household-centered practices are on the wane, and yet there is little to replace these practices was noted. Further, the radical changes and problems facing these practices in Buddhist temples and geographical (i.e., urban vs. rural) differences throughout Japan were debated. Members of the Moyoi no kai also offered examples on how new funerary practices are actually being developed. It was made clear that many elderly in Japan now face death alone, without the support of their family and others. This forum provided a congenial discussion and ended on a positive note.

## **A Report on Professor Julian Savulescu's Lecture**

**Masaki Ichinose( Associate Professor, Faculty of Letters,  
Philosophy)**

Professor Julian Savulescu of Oxford's Cross College gave a talk on June 30<sup>th</sup> at the University of Tokyo's Medical library. This was the second time he joined us, having first visited in June of 2003 through a COE-sponsored lecture. Professor Savulescu holds the Uehiro chair in practical ethics at Oxford, which is founded by the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education. His visit to Japan was also part of his work with the Uehiro Foundation. Professor Savulescu, who has just received an academic award in his native Australia, formerly studied medicine and is currently one of the world's foremost philosophers of applied and practical ethics. Doctor Savulescu is actually an old acquaintance of mine, and it was the first time I had met with him since I last saw him in England.

This lecture was on the Enhancement of human beings. Simply put, if medical treatment is designed to remove a state of illness and restore well-being (i.e., to remove the negative and bring it back to a state of equilibrium or “zero”), Enhancement is designed to improve upon this state and increase human capabilities.

To cite several well-known examples, doping in professional sports, the use of Viagra to enhance sexual performance, and the use of nicotine and caffeine to raise an individual's concentrative powers are all included under this term. Such Enhancement, however, is now becoming possible at the genetic level. Through genetic modification, the ability to improve the intellect, cognitive and somatic functions—along with the ability to modify and increase self-management ability, constructiveness, one's sense of humor, emotion, and anti-aggressiveness—is now technically possible. Accordingly, the ethical question as to whether or not one should realize such possibilities and enhance human beings arises. Professor Savulescu offers a radical answer to this question: Yes, we should enhance human beings. No doubt, the opposite opinion, that we should not carry out such “mindless enhancement,” violate the domain of God, or promote genetic discrimination, also arises. Savulescu, however, based on the standpoint of Utilitarianism, offers his own reply to this. For example, he cites 1) If there is no problem with improving our outward and surrounding environment to increase human potential, what is wrong with enhancing



humans themselves, which has the same structural benefits?; 2) There is no one who would argue that we should not use Enhancement and continue to allow rape and other crimes to continue unabated; and 3) The problem of discrimination is not part of Enhancement per se, but a social problem. Accordingly, human enhancement should be promoted as long as there are rational limits that are based on the principle of not harming others.

In all honesty, the radicalness of Savulescu's point caused many in the audience to be somewhat taken aback. His point, however, was not simply radical in its pitch, and he offered convincing arguments for it during the discussion session. During this session, a number of obvious questions were broached: Are there no alternative methods outside of Enhancement? How does Enhancement influence biological determinism? As the chair, I also was involved in the discussion and inquired if it was a fact that human beings seek happiness or if we are dealing with a certain normative value that says that humans should seek happiness.

If we are dealing with the latter, should such self-sacrificial and altruistic acts as a parent donating an organ to their child or, say, death in the name of one's honor (i.e., what the samurai did) be seen as being immoral? Savulescu explained that the pursuit of happiness is indeed a normative value. He also noted that self-sacrifice and "heroic" forms of suicide require further and more detailed analysis. Savulescu's talk gave us all much to consider, and we believe that it helped to expand the dimensions of our program. We would like to thank Professor Savulescu and the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education for their cooperation. We also hope that they will be able to assist our program in the future.



### ●Future Event●

## **Lecture Series of Professor John North (University College of London)**

**Hiroshi Ichikawa( Professor, Faculty of Letters, Religious Studies)**

### **Death and Life: The View of Ancient Romans and Its Transformation**

How did the religious traditions of the Roman Republican period change during the foundation of the Imperial era, in which a number of new religious movements challenged the political status quo? This series of talks dealt with a several basic problems connected to the study of life and death: How Romans of antiquity thought about death, how they related to their ancestors, and how they were enamored by beliefs in the afterlife. This five-part lecture series discussed the role of the classic Roman political system and religious institutions, how leading intellectuals conceived of death, how national rites were connected to ancestor worship, and how new Roman Religions imagined the afterlife. The final group discussion allowed for a summation of the proceeding lectures.

**November 7<sup>th</sup> Priests and Law in Republican Rome**



**How did Roman religious law relate to the Roman state in the middle Republican Period? What role did priests play in political life?**

**November 9<sup>th</sup> Cicero and Republican Divination**

**What did Cicero have to say about divination? What does this tell us about religious life at this time?**

**November 11<sup>th</sup> Caesar at the Lupercalia of 44 BCE**

**What influence did Caesar have on the Lupercalia festival? What sort of political significance did this festival have? How did this festival represent Roman attitudes towards the past and their ancestors?**

**November 15<sup>th</sup> The Underground Basilica at the Porta Maggiore**

**Does the existence of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC underground basilica indicate the existence of an anti-establishmentarian religious group? How did the members of this group depict life and death?**

**November 17<sup>th</sup> (Special Workshop)**

**Choice, Chance and Change in the History of Pagan Religions**

**Chair: Hiroshi Ichikawa**

**Respondents: Yasunori Kasai (University of Niigata)**

**Iskra Gencheva-Mikami (University of Tokyo Foreign Researcher)**

**This workshop dealt with the overall development of Roman religion in the Imperial period, and discussed how changes in understandings of death and salvation and competition with other religious movements influenced Roman religion.**

**International Symposium:  
“Death and Beyond: Dying with Willingness and Living with the Dead”  
(Feb. 18-19, 2006)  
Kazuomi Tada ( Professor, Faculty of Letters, Japanese Literature)**

**Today, death has been completely concealed from our lives, and, for the most part, we are not conscious of death on a day-to-day basis. Although death is inevitable and the dead constantly co-exist with us, at some point in time their existence has silently slipped away from our gaze.**

**However, in the past, the dead were perhaps felt as being more present among the living: even if death was the end of this life, the next life was seen as having importance. Although there was no doubt fear of judgment in the next life, it was believed that salvation could also be obtained there, and such a belief allowed people to overcome the contradictions and anxieties of this life. Further, the dead were held**



to watch and protect over us. Today, though, the overcoming of the problems in the here-and-now is left up to the individual.

That being said, a certain belief in the afterlife still exists. At this symposium a number of issues of importance for our current spiritual state—rituals dealing with the dead, the problem of martyrdom, the salvation of the individual, the meaning of Buddhist and Christian influences on beliefs concerning death—were dealt with. Such issues also have relevance for the modern phenomenon of suicide bombing, capital punishment, the Japanese custom of group suicide (*shinjū*), and the Yasukuni question. A number of disciplinary approaches were used. This symposium was made possible through the help of French scholars from EFEO (Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient), EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales), and INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales).



## Next-generation Death and Life Studies Conference

Norihiro Nihei (Researcher of COE Program, Sociology)

Along with being one of the main goals of the Construction of Death and Life studies project, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century COE program in general is designed to foster the work of young scholars. The “Next-generation Death and Life Studies Conference” was held as a concrete means of promoting this goal, and was designed to allow debate and discussion among young scholars and graduate students from a variety of disciplines.

The conference was held on November 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> in southern Wakayama Prefecture, and was divided into eight separate sections, an overall discussion, and an excursion to Kumano. In all, some 45 participants attended—including COE researchers, assistants, and younger researchers. Former members of the program who are now working at other universities and research facilities also attended. Seven graduate students and researchers who are part of Professor Carl Becker's Kyoto University seminar also attended. This allowed for a wonderful opportunity for interaction between young scholars at the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University.

The first day saw four sections: “Life and Death: Culture and Representation”, “Considering Life (Jp., inochi),” “Religion and Spirituality,” “Life, Human Relations, and Care.” The second day, which began in the morning, saw the remaining for sections: “Visions of Life and Death in Japan,” “Life, Death, and Education,” “Memory, Life, Death,” and “Philosophy and Views of Life and Death.”

A plenary session was held in the afternoon, which featured a keynote speech by Professor Carl Becker (Kyoto University) in which he addressed the implications of Japanese views of life and death (and bioethics) and the role of Japanese researchers and educators. This was followed by COE researcher Ken'ichi Maegawa, who examined the case of traditional views of life and death in Kumano. These two presentations were followed by comments from Atsushi Iida (Kamakura Women's University) and Yumi Furusawa (COE researcher) and a broad and engaging general discussion from the floor. On the third and final day, participants toured Kumano



**Hongū Taisha Shrine, in an attempt to learn about the role of Kumano in the formation of Japanese views on life and death.**

**The proceedings from this conference are scheduled to be printed in both a stand-alone volume and in an expanded format in the Journal of Death and Life Studies. It is hoped that this conference, which was planned by young researchers, will point the way to future developments in the field of death and life studies. It is also believed that this forum was beneficial in forming a broad interdisciplinary network among these young scholars.**



## **ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

### **Program Leader**

**SHIMAZONO Susumu** <Religious Studies>  
**TAKEUCHI Seiichi** <Ethics, deputy program leader>

### **Section1: Re-thinking Death and Life Studies from the Perspective of Practical Philosophy**

**KUMANO Sumihiko** <Ethics>  
**ICHINOSE Masaki** <Philosophy>  
**MATSUNAGA Sumio** <Philosophy>  
**SEKINE Seizo** <Ethics>  
**SAKAKIBARA Tetsuya** < Philosophy >

### **Section 2: Images and Perspectives on Death and Life**

**OSANO Shigetoshi** <Art History>  
**KINOSHITA Naoyuki** <Cultural Resources Studies>  
**ONUKI Shizuo** <Archaeology>

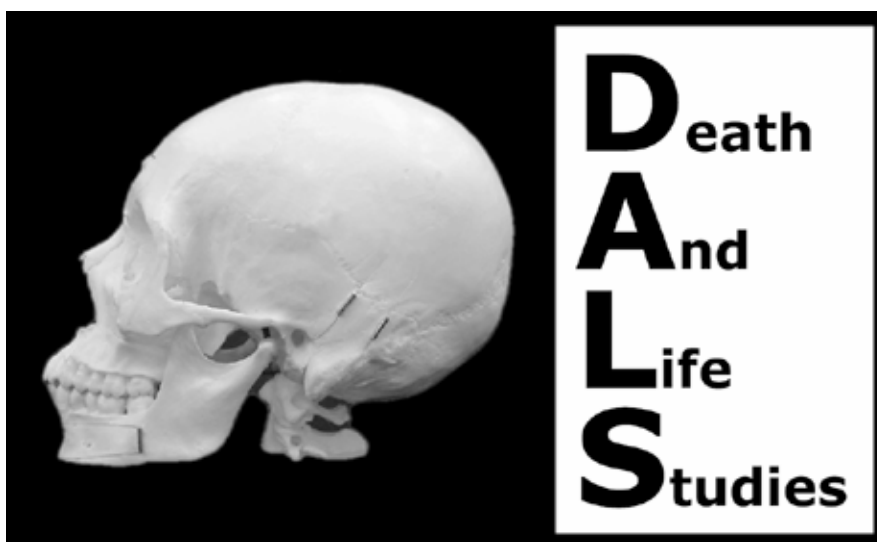
### **Section 3: Civilization and Values Concerning the Perspectives of Death and Life**

**SHIMODA Masahiro** <Indian Philosophy>  
**TADA Kazuomi** <Japanese Literature>  
**ICHIKAWA Hiroshi** <Religious Studies>  
**IKEZAWA Masaru** <Religious Studies >  
**KOJIMA Tsuyoshi** <Chinese Philosophy>

### **Section4: Investigation of the Perspective on Human Beings as and Expression of Life Activities**

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**YOKOSAWA Kazuhiko** <Psychology>  
**TACHIBANA Masao** <Psychology>  
**HAYASHI Toru** <Linguistics>  
**AKABAYASHI Akira** <Medical Ethics>  
**KAI Ichiro** <Health Sciences>  
**NISHIHARA Tadashi** <Education>  
**AKIYAMA Hiroko** <Social Psychology >





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