



21st century COE Program, The University of Tokyo
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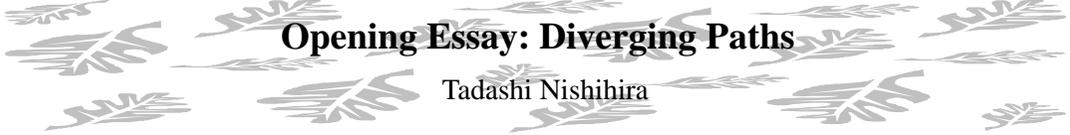
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Opening Essay: Diverging Paths

Tadashi Nishihira

There is a story that I remember well from a childhood, and I have to say I rarely read books as a child. The story goes like this: Three brothers who had just lost their parents set out on a journey. When they came to the edge of their village, there were three divergent roads. They decided to separate. The eldest son went to the right, the second son went down the middle, and the youngest son went to the left. The eldest met an official, under whose auspices he made patient efforts and became the best judge of the day. The second son somehow received a helping hand from a gang of robbers, and with his quick-witted nature became the most notorious gang leader of the day. The youngest son was taken in by a large shop-owner, whose daughter he happily married, and he became a famous wealthy man. Now, at a certain late hour of the night, the robber broke into the rich man's house, and after a dramatic chase, was caught and taken before the judge. "Show your face", said the judge, "Are you not my...?!" This is how it went.

Although I came to know later in life that this story was Kan Kikuchi's novel *Three Brothers*, in my mind, it remains as a story with a strong characteristic of Russian folk tale.

For whatever reason, I thought of this story repeatedly as a child. I first tried to decide which one of these brothers I was most similar to. I did not have the capacity to be a gang leader, nor did I have ability to become a judge. Which leaves me with a choice of waiting for the daughter of an affluent merchant.

However, what bothered me most was the horror of "separating points"; only one step, this way or that at the starting point, will make a great difference over time. I felt it not so much as a puzzle but a terror. A miniscule difference of a step will lead to a decisive distinction with an irreversible outcome.

Which path should I take then? What scared me was the lack of clear directives. I was nearly terrified. It was a feeling that had nothing to do with the nicety of youthful phrases such as the "adventure of life," or "challenging one's destiny."

Another question I had was whether these brothers were ever happy to be reunited with each other. If they had not met again after having gone their separate ways, each one of them would have walked on their own path without knowing the others. They were astounded by their difference only because they met again. Would it not have been better if they had not met again? Or were they happy to meet even if they felt it was painful? Was their moment of joy more intense only because they had to suffer?

I felt that writers were those wicked people who created such shining moments in life. Could we not lead a more peaceful life without knowing such shine? A moment of brilliance at the price of sorrow and pity! Without knowing that I was actually attracted to this light, I simply thought that such a story was mean.

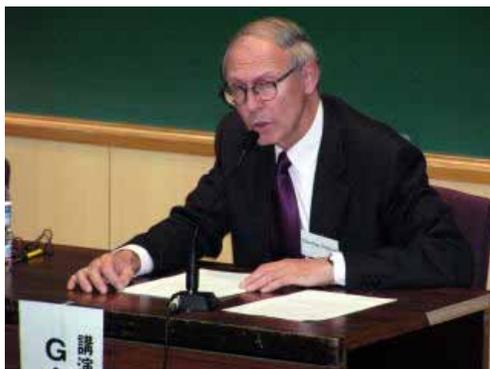
For some time since then, whenever I felt attracted to such words as life, fate, coincidence, narrative, I objected to them. However, after a while, thinking that I had gone too far distant from these words, I regretted the distance. This pattern of emotional tension persisted. I could not get into literature, nor could I study theology or philosophy. I was

rebellious toward scholarship itself doubting whether it could understand anything. I continued to write by accumulating rough letters on top of each other as if to tear myself off from language. After numerous attempts, I have finally come to feel half-desperate, half-disoriented. I now simply hope to attain a playful mindset with resignation at the bottom. Before I reach such a state of mind, I have no choice but to walk on my own path, at least for a while.

Looking back on the Symposium “The Co-Existence of the Dead and the Living”

Seizo Sekine

The symposium “The Co-Existence of the Dead and the Living,” which was held last fall (November 28 and 29, at Lecture Hall 1, Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo) with lecturers invited from both inside and outside the University, turned out to be one of the most meaningful research conferences for the COE. Since I was requested by the editorial office to make a belated report on this symposium, I will record what I remember on the basis of my notes taken at the time.



Professor G. Poeltner

The afternoon session on the 28th, with an audience of about 120 people in Lecture Hall 1, began with Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Sociology Takeshi Inagami’s memorable opening speech in which he told us about his experience of his mother’s recent death. Next, I, the General Chair Seizo Sekine (affiliated with the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology. Same affiliation for the individuals mentioned below unless otherwise noted), described that the purpose of this symposium was to compare the current trends in Japan with other civilizations, mentioning Lafcadio Hearn’s idea that ancestor worship is a virtue of the Japanese people. I then pointed out that, when Tetsuro Watsuji and others considered communal existence with others in criticizing European individualistic tendencies, the other was defined only spatially, i.e. in terms of the living who exist in a synchronic space. I then re-iterated the intention of this symposium which is to provide attention to the temporal other in the past, that is, to the dead. In accord with these ideas, the symposium consisted of three parts.

The topic of Part I was “How has contemporary philosophy conceptualized death?” (Chair: Professor Jun Matsuura.) University of Vienna Professor G. Poeltner gave a dense keynote lecture with the title “Aspects of Contemporary Philosophical Understanding of Death.” He pointed out a tendency to comprehend death as “nothingness,” rather than to talk about metaphysical death, the concept of which

presupposes “the other world,” and “reincarnation.” This assertion strongly impressed many participants. As a commentator, I posed questions about how “nothingness” in the contemporary Heideggerian sense was related to a traditional “non-being” in the West and to “absolute nothingness” in the East. I also asked, challenging the tendency of such nihilistic philosophies to disregard the problem of the other, how Dr. Poeltner thought of a sense of co-existence with the dead, who lived on in the memories of the living. There were many questions from the audience to which Professor Poeltner answered with great care and politeness. Part I, I contend, was successful. A welcome party was held at Forest Hongo in the evening.

Despite rain the following day, about the same number of participants joined Parts II & III, at the beginning of which the General Chair explained the relationship between Part I and Parts II & III. The morning session started with Part II “The Dead and the Living in Various Civilizations (Chair: Assistant professor Masaru Ikezawa.) Princeton University Professor S. Teiser and Graduate School of Art and Sciences Professor Hisao Miyamoto were the keynote speakers. Professor Teiser talked about the Buddhist geometry of death using numerous slides. Professor Miyamoto, from his own unique viewpoint that was grounded in Hebraistic Hayatology, presented his vision concerning the question of how to create a festival space that would position itself between death in a symbolic sense in the present age (e.g. refugees without rights) and life (e.g. the community of refugees.) Institute of Oriental Culture Professor Gaynor Sekimori and University of Tsukuba Assistant Professor Kazuko Shiojiri served as commentators, who discussed the presented theme in relation to their own specializations, the *Shugen-do* and Islamic Philosophy, respectively.

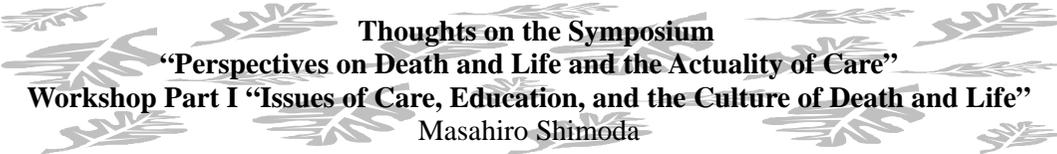
Part III of the symposium took place in the afternoon. It was titled “The Present Context for the Dead and the Living” (Chair: Professor Fumihiko Sueki). The panelists were Professor Hiroshi Watanabe, Tokyo Medical and Dental University Professor Tetsuo Watanabe, and Arizona State University Professor J. Foard. The commentators were Assistant Professor Kakumyo Kanno, University of Sapporo Professor F. Rambelli, and University of Osaka Professor Kunimitsu Kawamura, respectively.

Mr. Hiroshi Watanabe discussed the “modernity” of the perspective of death and life as heard in Western music, playing a Funeral March and a Requiem on a CD player. The commentators mainly challenged the politics of the presented arguments. Mr. Tetsuo Watanabe, citing a case where a schizophrenic patient killed his/her father, argued that we would fall into a catastrophe unless we reached the deeper layer of the co-existence with the dead and the living, rather than staying at the surface level of the co-existence of the living, thereby giving a strong warning to the present age from a psychiatric viewpoint. However, some questioned on what grounds one could consider the co-existence with the living to be on the surface level. Finally, Mr. Foard talked about the prospect that in our post-Holocaust/Hiroshima era, the significance of meaningless mass death could only be secured by keeping close and alive by the living the memory of the dead as a weapon to prevent such massive deaths in the future. In response, a question was raised whether we should have called these incidents massacres, rather than mass deaths. At the end of the symposium, Program Leader Professor Susumu Shimazono thanked all the participants, especially the speakers and panelists, and the COE specially appointed researchers who

devoted themselves to the preparation and management of the symposium. The symposium then closed amidst a large applause from the audience.

This symposium opened in Part I with a challenge offered from the viewpoint of contemporary nihilistic philosophy: what would happen if we abandoned narratives (such as that of an otherworld) to speak about metaphysical death altogether? In part III, the importance of remembering the dead, whether distant or close, above all those who died an absurd death, and thinking about one's own historical origins, was emphasized. In so doing, achieving the communality of the living with the dead was found to be a way to overcome nihilism. At that point, I felt that the symposium might have finally come full circle.

A year ago I wrote in the University Newsletter reporting on the same event and the project's intention as follows: keeping this as a working hypothesis, we would like to take it to the place where each of us does research and then re-examine it. We also hope to deepen our nascent collective inquiry in cooperation with each other again. Listening to the panelists from both inside and outside the university at the closing evening party on the second day, and from the questionnaires filled out by the audience, I sensed that many participants shared the same feelings as mine. This is another reason why I am reiterating this point again here. A year passed, and our collective inquiry still continues on many levels, from the invitation of visiting professors to giving speeches and lectures outside the university to exchanging opinions about particular problems through e-mails. I hope to share the fruits of these activities sometime at future COE events.



Thoughts on the Symposium
“Perspectives on Death and Life and the Actuality of Care”
Workshop Part I “Issues of Care, Education, and the Culture of Death and Life”
Masahiro Shimoda

(held Jun 12, 2004 9:30-17:45 in the Faculty Lounge, Faculty of Law & Letters
Bldg. 2, Literature Department, the University of Tokyo)

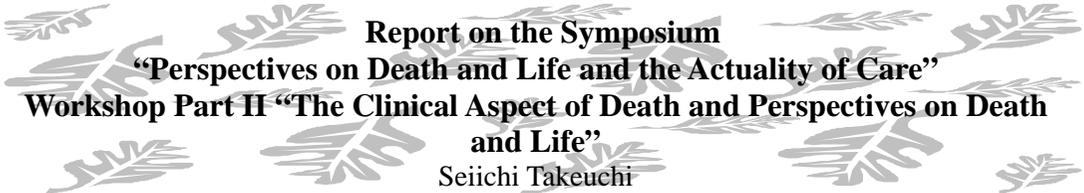
The process of dying is like traveling (Alan Kellehear). When traveling is over, there are no more places to travel to. If death is a process and also traveling, it can only be “something,” rather than nothing.

Whether we think that living forms a whole, or when we look back on our personal history, this supposition is not too far-fetched. Whenever one species is about to extinguish, another new species is born. When a person dies, his/her soul never dies, and his/her thought continues to live. Just as the species that has undergone many deaths strengthens its power as a species, so does the ethnic sentiment carried on throughout history. Through the going away of the parental generation, which should become nothing, ethnic sentiment only continues to be reborn as a stronger and clearer “something.”

Thinking that the difficult problems that lie in front of us will be eliminated by violence and death is an illusion comparable to believing a magician’s magic. “Something” cannot become nothing in death. Not only that, that “something” can even become stronger through death. From any standpoint, to understand death by paying attention to death as an endpoint is to play into the hands of the magician who tries to focus all of our attention on a single point. Those of us who exist and live in actuality, rather than being a spectator of the magic theater, have no interest in the moment or meaning of death. What is an undeniable question, instead, are those problems that persist to exist, problems that cannot be liquidated by death.

After this workshop, I was surprised by the proximity of relationships between care and education. Both patients in a hospice and children in a classroom face the same challenge that never ends by an idealistic death, however deftly it is concocted. And they are both trembling at the bottom of their hearts. In either care or education, such a gaze at the other always reflects back upon ourselves, forcing us to embody the challenge itself.

When we reach such a terrain, we cannot afford to discuss death and life simply as matters of culture. If anything helps us in confronting this question, it would be the honesty and rigor with which we approach it. Indeed, I personally felt that while the opinions expressed from the standpoints of care and education softened the challenge or even pushed it a little, the voices that discussed culture made the question vanish just like a magician.



Report on the Symposium
“Perspectives on Death and Life and the Actuality of Care”
Workshop Part II “The Clinical Aspect of Death and Perspectives on Death
and Life”
Seiichi Takeuchi

The public symposium “The Clinical Aspect of Death and Perspectives on Death and Life” was held in the auditorium of the Faculty of Medicine (Hongo Campus) on June 26, 2004. It was the second part of the Symposium “Perspectives on Death and Life and the Actuality of Providing Care,” which was co-sponsored by our project and The Applied Ethics Education Program of the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology.

The panel consisted of University of Chiba Professor Yoshinori Hiroi (Philosophy of Science), Osaka Prefecture University Professor Masahiro Morioka (Bioethics), Mr. Kunio Yanagida (Writer), and Yamanashi Eiwa University Professor Kazumi Wakabayashi (Pedagogy). I served as Chair.

The symposium began with Mr. Hiroi’s presentation, in which he pointed out that “hollowing out of perspectives on death and life” has spread widely across Japan, an attitude typified by the phrase “when one dies, s/he becomes nothing.” He contended that this phenomena runs parallel to the recent tendency to think nothing of and abstract the sensitivity for the existence of gods or and/or Buddha. He found it important for each of us to re-discover death as a “place to which his/her soul can return” in our own ways by exploring the deeper layers of primitive Shintoist or Buddhist perspectives on death and life. Professor Hiroi further asserted that the Japanese have left aside and forgotten these perspectives since the Pacific War, particularly after the period of rapid economic growth.

Responding to Professor Hiroi’s argument, Professor Morioka expressed that he himself did not believe in a world after death, and that the common phrase “when one dies, s/he becomes nothing” expresses his sensitivity about death more appropriately. He then raised the question of how those people with such sensitivity should bid farewell to this world. He further asked how we could provide care for such people. Insisting that the most pivotal issue does not lie in the world after death, but in the possibility of reconciling ourselves with this world which would continue after our death, he argued for “perspectives on death and life by those who cannot believe in the world after death” on the basis of his long-held idea of a “civilization without pain.”

Mr. Yanagida’s position was based upon his own experience of the death of his son and the reading of many personal memoirs written by people struggling against illness. He argued that it was important for each of us to complete or conclude our own life when facing the death of someone, and that in so doing we start to establish assent with death. Mr. Yanagida also submitted that ours is the time in which everyone creates his/her own narrative of death. He then advocated a “humanist medicine for those who make their own narrative,” in which we would incorporate a kind of perspectivism that questions whose viewpoint we take to watch death.

Finally, Professor Wakabayashi, who had been the president of “The Society of Little Winds,” a group of parents who have lost their children, spoke about the “sorrows

of a bereaved family.” He argued that people become sick in body and soul in a society where they cannot cry when they want to. He emphasized how indifferent we are to so many things that can only be seen through sadness and sorrow. Reporting on many concrete case studies, he asserted that what gave a person the vital power to live lays at the very bottom of suffering and sorrow.

Responding to the presentations by these four speakers, the discussion session touched on four points: 1) how to understand perspectives on death and life, metaphysics, and religiosity; 2) the dimensions of narrative; 3) how to provide care giving perspectives on death and life; and 4) the potentials of sorrow.

The symposium lasted about four hours, from 2 p.m. to a little before 6 p.m. The audience of more than 300 people expressed many opinions, questions, and thoughts, which signaled the heightened interest people have on the theme “Clinical Aspects of Death and Perspectives on Death and Life.”

Report on Specially Appointed Professor Kenji Matsuo’s Lecture Part I “Medieval Death from the Standpoint of Official vs. Reclusive Monk Model”

Fumihiko Sueki

In this lecture, Professor Matsuo discussed the novelty of *Kamakura* New Buddhism in a concrete manner using his own model of official vis a vis reclusive monks, and touched upon the relationship of monks to funerals rites with particular emphasis of the role of body.

In the first half of the lecture, Professor Matsuo surveyed how his model of official vis a vis reclusive monks can be positioned within the discursive development of *Kamakura* Buddhism. According to his survey, during the period following the Pacific War, the common view A (the theory of *Kamakura* New and Old Buddhism) was first dominant. Then the common view B (the theory of Exoteric-Esoteric system) came to dominate as a result of research developments. However, it was then discovered that common view B could not necessarily articulate the actuality of Medieval Buddhism. This led to the formulation of Professor Matsuo’s model, whose central elements involved a dynamic relationship between official and reclusive monks.

In the second half of the lecture, Professor Matsuo discussed the fact that it was reclusive monks who had performed funerals for the common people on the basis of his model. Using historical sources, he then demonstrated that this fact had strongly influenced the establishment of the Japanese perspectives on death and life. By leaving the official monk status, the reclusive monks managed to free themselves from the idea of “*Kegare*” (smear), which enabled them to engage in various activities including funerals that official monks were not permitted to perform. Consequentially, the practice of



Professor Matsuo

afterlife rescue of Buddhism became widespread, which further enhanced the role that Buddhism played in the salvation of the “individual.”

In the discussion session that followed the hour long lecture, many opinions and questions were exchanged. For example:

- The need to consider afterlife salvation and the treatment of the body as two sides of the same coin.
- The need to think about “pollution from birth” as well as “pollution from death.”
- In India too, the funeral rituals developed when esoteric Buddhism prevailed.
- A challenge for the future is to consider the relationship between the funereal Buddhism and the religion of early modern “*Ie*” system (the traditional family).
- The need to examine how to understand the activities of Gyoki, Kuya, Jishu, etc.

Report on Specially Appointed Professor Kenji Matsuo’s Lecture part II “Death and Life Studies and the Medieval *Ritsu* Monks”

Kakumyo Kannno

In this lecture, Professor Matsuo discussed the uniqueness of medieval reclusive monks in terms of salvation of the dead, the systematization of the funeral system, perspectives on death and life, and artistic objects related to death.

In the opening section, Professor Matsuo introduced a view that understood the actuality of medieval Buddhism as the relationship of co-existence, division of labor, and opposition between official and reclusive monks. Based on the case study of the Saidai-ji of the *Ritsu* sect, Professor Matsuo described the ways in which the uniqueness of the activities of reclusive monks was secured in relation with official monks. He then demonstrated that at the center of the unique activities of *Ritsu* monks as reclusive monks was their positive commitment to funerals; in this discussion, various aspects of the relationship between the *Ritsu* monks and the dead were demonstrated, illustrated by concrete cases of the establishment of Komyo-shingon-kai, an organization of *Saikaishu* (the company of purifiers), the control of *hinin* (the outcasts), and so on. Several important points were then delineated, such as: that ways in which the purity of *kairitsu* (religious precepts of the *Ritsu* sect), which determined the identity of *Ritsu* monks, became the ground to overcome the fear of pollution from death easily, which had been taboo for official monks from the ancient times; that magic and skills of dealing with the body not only brought about the notion of esteeming the dead, which had been considered as one of the most impure beings, but also played an important role in the creation of artistic objects related to death, exemplified by *gojunoto* (five-storied pagoda), *sharihei* (Buddhist funeral urn), etc.

A discussion session followed an hour-long lecture and the exchange of opinions was lively. The issues raised included: the meaning of esteeming the dead, whether fearing the body was not essentially a form of esteeming it, the need to explore the actuality of funerals in places other than the ones surrounding official monks, and so on.

Organizational Chart

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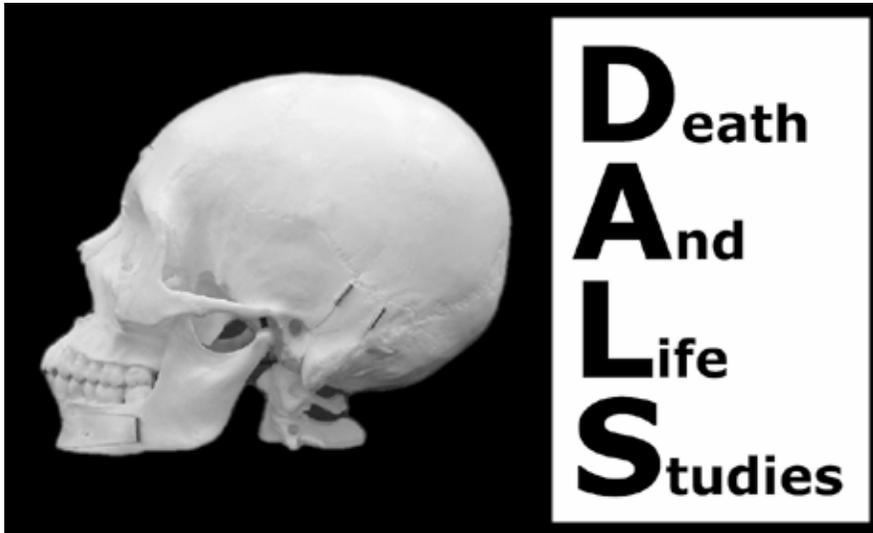
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“Construction of Death and Life Studies concerning Culture and Value of life”

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