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The First Science and Humanities Forum between
Japan and Russia

Death and Life Studies in Contemporary Contexts

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Self-introduction

- ▶ major interests

causation, the concept of person,
probability, philosophy of punishment,
animal ethics, philosophy of music

I am also working as a Project Leader of
Global COE programme, 'Death and Life
Studies' at the University of Tokyo.

Death and Life Studies (DALs)

We do NOT call us 'Thanatology'.



We of course consider many issues concerning 'Death'.

E.g. cultures and histories of funeral, terminal care, euthanasia, biological death, the death penalty, and so on

However, we consider not only issues about death but also those about **'Life'**.



E.g. relation between ethics and evolutionary theory, relation between humans and animals, criminal responsibility of mentally disordered offenders and so on

We aim at establishing 'Death and Life Studies' (DALs) as an independent discipline with the proper methodology in the future

Focuses the DALS provides are on
**‘what tends to be hidden in
our modern society’.**

→ The typical case is ‘Death’.

Our society tends to hide death or dead
bodies.

However, the mankind has kept the wisdom of being always aware of death, as death is always near us.

→ memento mori
「常住死身」

DALS: an attempt to revive that wisdom in our contemporary contexts

Two recent examples

1. relation between humans and animals

Our society cannot go well at all without animals.

E.g. medicine, cosmetics, furs, shoes, meats and so on

The scene of animal experimentation or slaughter for such purposes tends to be hidden.

← DALIS

The crucial question;

what kind of rights or personhood could be ascribed to animals, particularly mammals that are supposed to be able to feel pain?

★ Two aspects

- animal experimentation
- meat-eating

★ Standard idea of animal welfare

3R

replacement

reduction

refinement



▲ trends in animal ethics

- **animal rights**
- **animal liberation**

My argument

original significance of the concept
of 'person'

← persona

← persono



◆ person: the subject to give voice
or sounds

▲ This interpretation has an affinity to the traditional usage of the concept of person.

person: a free and responsible agent

free → claiming or protesting

responsible → 'should respond'

Those are made by 'giving voices or sounds'.

We could introduce the concept of

'degrees of personhood'

by considering how able they are to give voices or sounds to claim their pains



- ▼ Continuity and difference between human and animals could be appropriately treated in terms of these 'degrees of personhood'.

2. Nuclear plants accident on 3.11 in Japan

people are exposed to some doses of radiation, particularly in the east area of Japan.



The problem of low dose radiation

★those who tend to be hidden in the society



- workers in nuclear plants
- people still living in the area relatively close to the Fukushima nuclear power plants

★fierce controversy in contemporary Japan

→how dangerous it is to be
exposed to low dose radiation
for many years

Lots of uncertainties appear.

■ On the one hand,
people make an effort to avoid exposure
to radiation as far as they could, in terms
of rejecting foods or anything coming from
contaminated area.



this is quite natural for them to keep
and defend their lives, particularly lives
of children

■ On the other hand

Workers in the plants and people in contaminated area are unlikely to be focused.

Although, generally, it is said that recovery in affected area is important, even discrimination against victims occurs unfortunately.

Here is

a kind of moral *dilemma*,

which was originally caused by

a kind of *antinomy*
in science.

Here is
another emergent subject of
'Death and Life Studies'.

▲ We will conduct this study with learning
from the case of Chernobyl in 1986 as
well as Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

- ◆ We DALS will aim at highlighting matters that are likely to be hidden in the society.
- ★ We will seek the reconstruction of the wisdom on death that we human being has cultivated.

Thank you for your attention!!