

WE-Issue and Its Social Implications

This workshop brings together scholars from different research streams on self and identity, with a view to opening interdisciplinary discussions on “WE-issues” and their social implications. This event is jointly organized by Smart WE Projects of the JSPS (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science) and JST (Japan Science and Technology Agency), and CAPE (Center for Applied Philosophy and Ethics) at the Graduate School of Letters, Kyoto University.

Date: Sunday, February 4, 2024 (10:30 am – 17:15 pm)

Venue: Kyoto University, Yoshida Campus, Research Bldg. No 2 (#34 on the following map), Seminar Room No. 10.

- <https://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/access/main-campus-map>

Program:

Time	Speaker	Title
10:30 – 10:35	Opening Remark	
10:35 – 11:20	Yasuo Deguchi	We-Turn and Its Social Implications
11:25 – 12:10	Cheng-Ju Lu	The Expansion-Constriction Dynamics of Time-Space Experience and Its Link to Self
12:10 – 13:40	Lunch Break	
13:40 – 14:25	Yen-Yi Shi	The Whole-Part Concept of Spiritual Growth From the Perspective of Psychological Space
14:30 – 15:15	Takafumi Kato	Peircean ‘WE’: Semiotics for Smart Communities in the Future
15:15 – 15:40	Short Break	
15:40 – 16:25	Kevin Berryman	Interdependent Responsibility in Light of Not-Self
16:30 – 17:15	Kai-Yuan Cheng	A World-based View of Personal Identity in the <i>Zhuangzi</i>

Each slot will consist of a 25-minute presentation and a 20-minute Q&A, but speakers will have some flexibility within their allotted time (45 minutes).

Organizers:

Yasuo Deguchi (Kyoto University)

Kazuhiro Watanabe (Kyoto University)

About the Workshop

As long as they are alive, it is an unavoidable situation or condition for humans to coexist with others, and to live with others. In other words, as individuals called "I," humans always remain members of the collective "we," which includes myself.

It is noted, however, that here "we" not only refers to groups, communities, and societies consisting exclusively of humans, but also encompasses para-human systems, including non-human living beings and inanimate objects (natural and artificial).

Of course, not all "we" are good "we." Just as there are good "I" and bad "I," there are also good "we" and bad "we."

Then the following questions arise: What is "we"? What kind of entity is it? Is it capable of exerting a certain causal influence on its members including "me" and other objects? If it is capable, how is it done?

Moreover, what constitutes the bond or tie that brings together a multitude of agents into a single "we" — let's call this bond the "we-principle"? Does a member of "we" have an awareness or phenomenology of being a member of it? If so, how is it embraced?

Furthermore, what constitutes the good "we"? What about the bad "we"? How can one define the "goodness" and "badness" of "we"? How should "we," and "I," as a member of it, contribute to making it good, better, and best?

"We" is not "everyone." Unlike "everyone," "we" always has external agents referred to as "they." This might be a chronic disease of "we" because "they" can easily transform into the "busters" or "enemies" who might be deemed acceptable targets for missile attacks. How should "we" avoid such "busterization" of "they" and prevent the escalation of hostilities against its outside?

Let's refer to those ontological, phenomenological, ethical, and axiological issues surrounding "we" collectively as the "we-issue".

Such "we-issues" are serious and pressing social concerns in today's world. We can discuss these "we-issues" within the framework of contemporary politics, or in the context of the relationship between humans and AI/robots. In this workshop, we aim to engage in interdisciplinary discussions, including philosophy, to address the broader spectrum of "we-issues" with its social implications.

Yasuo Deguchi

Abstracts

We-Turn and Its Social Implications

Yasuo Deguchi

Kyoto University

Abstract:

This paper introduces a novel theory of value or axiology called "WE-turn" and derives its implications for relationships among human individuals, among human groups (such as modern nation-states) as well as the relationships between humans and artifacts or natural entities.

This paper has three sections. The first section primarily delves into the domain of action theory, by observing the fundamental incapability of all human individuals, i.e., the incapability of any single action, and then claiming the We-turn of the doer, that is, the shift or turn of the subject or the unit of any somatic action from an individual or 'I' to a multi-agent system or 'We', that includes the 'I'.

Based on the We-turn of the doer, the second section goes on to advocate the We-turn of the values, that is, the shift or turn of the subject or the unit of such pivotal value concepts as responsibility, rights, wellbeing, and freedom.

Finally, the third section proposes the fellowship model for the ideal relationship among all members of the We, which includes humans, non-human lives, and non-lives (natural things and artifacts). This move amounts to endowing all those entities and agents the basic fellowship rights. The fellowship model is an alternative to, among others, the conventional model between humans and robots; i.e., the master-slave model.

The Expansion-Constriction Dynamics of Time-Space Experience and Its Link to Self

Cheng-Ju Lu

Medical School, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU), Taiwan

Abstract:

The way we perceive time and space shapes our fundamental experience of the world. Investigating how this perception changes in different mental states like anxiety and during meditation has been a key focus in both phenomenology and psychology. This work consists of two main parts.

In the first part, I first show what my previous collaborative work with Georg Northoff and his team on the development of Scale of the Time and Space Experience in Anxiety (STEA) has achieved: we have found that the constriction of time-space experience is the common feature behind the alteration of time-space experience in anxiety. My analysis on the qualitative record of alteration of time-space experience in meditation also echoes this, discovering that the expansion of time-space experience is the common feature in meditation. Based on these findings, I propose a conceptual framework, i.e., an expansion and the constriction model, for our understanding of how our time-space experience transforms across different mental states. On this basis, I further undertake a neuroscientific perspective to demonstrate how this expansion-constriction dynamics of time-space experience can be anchored to the predictive coding theory, a brain function theory postulating that brain is constantly generating and updating a "predictive world" in order to interact with the environment. The main claim

made here is that the effectiveness of the updating process serves as the isomorphism between the brain and the time-space experience.

In the second part, I link the conceptual framework of expansion-constriction dynamics of time-space experience to the inquiry of self. The key is to highlight two things, that the nature of self involves a sense of boundary, and that a sense of boundary is assumed and inherent in the conceptual framework in question. A sense of boundary not only serves as the boundary in the time-space experience, but also implies the boundary between the self and the environment, thus making it crucial that an expansion-constriction dynamics of time-space experience holds key to exposing the bounded nature of self. By taking this phenomenological and neuro-empirical approach, I hope to shed light on how self is anchored in the spatiotemporal dynamics of the world, and how this work can bear clinical implications.

The Whole-Part Concept of Spiritual Growth From the Perspective of Psychological Space

Yen-Yi Shi

Institute of Philosophy of Mind and Cognition, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan

Abstract:

People usually describe wise men or saints as far-sighted, not short-sighted, setting goals in the long-term future, caring about whole human being, loving the whole vast world, having a big heart, etc. Note that the descriptions in these sentences are presented in a way of distance or space. In other words, it is implied that they have a greater sense of time and space thinking or psychological space. In the context of CLT, this involves high-level construal, a long-distance way of thinking about the big picture or the whole, as opposed to a short-distance way of thinking about details and parts. This may also indicate that spiritual growth is related to the expansion of psychological space. It also indicates a thinking training from part to whole. In addition to the expansion to the whole, spiritual tradition also requires consistent modification of concrete behaviors, which is a practice from the whole to the part. From the perspective of CLT, we can see the relationship between the whole and partial concept in the changing of psychological space. In this presentation, logic levels theory, Master Sheng-Yan's practice theory, Maslow's need theory and Confucius' spiritual growth will be used as examples to illustrate the importance and commonality of the mutual support of the whole and the parts in different spiritual growth. Finally, we have found that the common thread of spiritual growth is the expansion and transcendence of psychological space, which ultimately brings the experience back to the daily life. The idea is also the concept of harmonizing between the whole and the parts. Just like Chan Buddhism says that seeing a mountain is a mountain, then seeing a mountain is not a mountain, and finally returning to seeing a mountain is still a mountain.

Peircean 'WE': Semiotics for Smart Communities in the Future

Takafumi Kato

Osaka Seikei University

Abstract:

Artificial intelligence (AI) and robots are rapidly entering our society. With this background in mind, this paper would like to ask: how can the co-existence of AI and robots and humans be realised in the future society?

A Japanese robotics researcher Taniguchi Tadahiro has proposed the theory of symbol emergence systems since around 2010, offering a new concept of symbol, which is based on Charles S. Peirce's semiotics. Although the traditional AI research has proceeded on the implicit assumption that the symbol systems operating in society are fixed with regard to the relationship between objects and symbols, Peircean semiotics rather considers symbols themselves as dynamic processes. Peirce suggests that the function of symbols is closely related to habits; symbols do not constitute a fixed binary relationship between objects and symbols, but are involved in a triadic relationship that includes the 'interpretant'. Furthermore, this paper would like to suggest that other insights of Peircean thought can also make a further contribution in envisaging smart communities in the future in which AI and robots and humans harmonically coexist.

This paper thus shows how Taniguchi's theory of symbol emergence systems are supported by the ideas of Peircean semiotics, and how Peirce's insights can be impactful in this context.

Interdependent Responsibility in Light of Not-Self

Kevin Berryman

Monash Center for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies, Monash University, Australia

Abstract:

Buddhism holds an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, all humans are not-self (*anattā*). On the other, humans are said to be responsible for their actions (*karma*), which seems to evoke a self who can be responsible. This apparent contradiction brings up the question of who is morally responsible if there is no self? I argue that as the Buddhist subscribes to the not-self position, then by default they are moral responsibility skeptics. At first blush this appears to be a problem for responsibility in terms of karma. But this problem is solved once the machinations of impersonal *interdependent* causality (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) are taken into account, where action and responsibility can still be attributed to humans without needing a self. This kind of interdependent causality allows for attributions of responsibility to be considered as inter-relationally connected with the broader biological, social and causal system an individual finds themselves in, and ensures harmful practices associated with retributive, desert-based responsibility is not targeted solely at an isolated individual.

A World-based View of Personal Identity in the *Zhuangzi*

Kai-Yuan Cheng

Professor of Institute of Philosophy of Mind and Cognition National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan

Abstract:

The concern about death and life is a major issue in the philosophy of Zhuangzi. What happens to me when I die? Will I survive death? These are the issues that fundamentally concern us. To suitably address them, it requires an in-depth inquiry into the nature of self and personal identity. I have exposed a no-self thesis held by Zhuangzi in his dream of the butterfly argument, which leads to the conclusion that a persistently existing self is an illusion (Cheng, 2014). In this talk, I try to further show what it is to be a human person across time, absent a persistently existing self in the conscious mental realm, in Zhuangzi's view. I conduct this inquiry in the context of philosophical discussions on personal identity by John Locke, Derek Parfit, and Mark Johnston. I offer a novel interpretation of Zhuangzi where a Genuine Human could literally survive death in a world-based view of personal identity.