

Impact Objectives

- Trace some new ideas emerging in theories of justice
- Examine ethics of care as a theory criticising the concept of justice
- Envisage a more decent society acknowledging human vulnerability

Ethics for protecting the vulnerable

Professor Tetsuhiko Shinagawa is interested in philosophy and ethics, and how these can be effectively applied to highlight and better understand human vulnerability and support vulnerable people



Can you introduce us to the approaches that can be adopted in ethics?

Ethics has three approaches or fields:

normative ethics, descriptive ethics (history of ethics) and metaethics. Normative ethics discusses what and why we should, may or may not do. Descriptive ethics researches various ethical theories evolved over history. Metaethics investigates the meanings of each ethical norm and the feature of moral thinking.

The question of why we should aid the needy belongs to normative ethics. What answer a certain norm (for example, justice) gives to this question depends on the meaning of the norm. We must, therefore, inquire meta-ethically as to what 'justice' means. Since the meaning and importance of a norm often varies in different ethical theories, we are engaged in descriptive ethics: we must research many philosophers and thoughts that have influenced the meanings of norms.

What is your particular interest in philosophy and applied ethics?

Philosophy is attractive to me because of its spirit of lending deep thinking to things that might seem to be self-evident. In the last half

of the 1980s in Japan, applied ethics began to be studied vigorously. I participated in the research as a graduate student and young researcher. Applied ethics endeavours to give guidelines for actual issues that emerge newly in society. This feature confers the naming on ethical considerations about various themes. However, my interest in philosophy meant I was less interested in the practical functions of applied ethics and more interested in the analyses of the logical structure from which guidelines are deduced (normative ethics) and the study of the meanings of norms mentioned there (metaethics). Thus, I tackle ethics in general.

What type of research are you engaged in at the Faculty of Letters, Kansai University?

I preside over Kansai University Society for Ethical Studies and edit the online magazine *Journal for Ethical Studies*. I translated *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft: Eine Philosophie der Freiheit* written by Otfried Höffe into Japanese with two colleagues. It was published by Hosei University Press in 2020.

From your perspective, what is the ultimate impact of your research?

We now seem to believe that the following ideas are self-evident: society consists of self-sufficient and equal members (the concept of modern society.) It is just that distribution

is done in proportion to merit (Aristotle's concept of distributive justice) and the merit is identified with labour and achievements obtained by it (Locke's theory of right to property.) It is highly estimated to be productive and the blame for being needy is put on the person themselves (neoliberalism).

My research challenges such a view of society, tracing some new ideas emerging in theories of justice (Rawls, luck egalitarianism, and so on), and examining ethics of care as a theory criticising the concept of justice, and aims to envisage a more decent society acknowledging human vulnerability. Therefore, the needy as well as the people caring for them will be the first to benefit from this research.

How does your work focus on human vulnerability?

Ethics and philosophy work on people to transform their thoughts. This research focuses on human vulnerability. It suggests the risk that mere distribution in proportion to merits will result in an enlargement of the difference between the rich and the poor and only some transient victories. It thinks deeply into the significance of the fact that we have cooperated and established a society. Ethics is a study that reverses division and fragmentation by enquiring into what human beings are. ►

Transforming justice and the concept of care

Professor Tetsuhiko Shinagawa is seeking a richer concept of justice and an effective concept of care, which he explains are societally-important studies

Professor Tetsuhiko Shinagawa is a professor of philosophy and ethics at the Faculty of Letters at Kansai University, Japan. He began studying applied ethics in the 1980s and today is interested in ethics in general, with a specific focus on the foundations of ethics. Each ethical theory is based on a norm or norms that it estimates to be most essential. For example,

of care” is given to the ethical theorists sharing Gilligan’s idea. Jonas’ principle of responsibility posits that human survival is dependent on our ability to care for the planet, with our actions having a direct impact on the Earth’s future and insists on the present generation’s responsibility for the existence of coming generations.’

Aristotle’s concept of distributive justice does not help the needy because it demands distribution in proportion to the person’s merit and being needy cannot be counted as merit,’ comments Shinagawa. ‘However, we now have the idea of social justice, as constructed by Rawls’ theory of justice. And luck egalitarianism has advanced Rawls’ idea that no one deserves their luck. On

‘The concept of justice assumes that society consists of self-sufficient, autonomous and equal members. This understanding, according to ethics of care, loses sight of human vulnerability’

utilitarianism is founded on the norm of goodness in the sense of greater happiness. The difference of these fundamental norms reflects a variety of ethical theories. It leads to conflicts among them as to what should be fulfilled above all.

From Shinagawa’s perspective, the modern orthodox ethical theories such as liberalism and deontology are founded on justice and right. ‘They presuppose that society consists of equal and self-sufficient members. It is the modern society itself where social rise can be acquired by each person’s abilities and efforts. In fact, however, it is not the case that all members meet the requirement. We must be helped by others when we are young, ill, disabled and very old,’ he highlights.

He sought for ethical theories founded on other norms than justice. ‘Two important ethical theories were found: psychologist Carol Gilligan’s ethic of care and Hans Jonas’ principle of responsibility,’ Shinagawa comments. ‘Gilligan attained her idea through her psychological research on morality development. Ethic of care is a normative ethical theory that stems from the interconnected nature of the human condition and surrounds the need for responsiveness to the vulnerability of human beings. The naming of “ethics

DELVING INTO ETHICAL NORMS

In his current research, Shinagawa is exploring how the ethical norms of justice and care can be applied to social issues and aid vulnerable members of society. At the intersections of these are important lessons for aiding people in need, and this is where his research project sits. ‘This research will investigate how two contrasted and mutually supplementing ethical norms, namely, justice and care, can lead to overlapping guidelines for aiding the needy as an actual social issue, transforming their respective conceptions,’ Shinagawa explains. He has identified shortcomings with the two norms. Justice means that each person should be given what they deserve. It demands that they show their right or entitlement to it. This has limitations in that it may prevent people who cannot independently meet their needs from being assisted. Care is usually thought to function only in an intimate circle. In order to be effective in larger society this must be expanded out from intimate relationships to encompass relationships on a broader scale. In order to overcome these respective limitations and then combine two norms, Shinagawa is seeking a richer concept of justice and an effective concept of care.

‘This is a hard, but promising project.

the other hand, some theorists of ethics of care have evolved their own social theories: Virginia Held, Nel Noddings and Eva Feder Kittay (especially her theory of ‘doulia’) and so on. Two contrastive norms, justice and care, are getting closer to sharing the same issues and perhaps (even if theoretically different, but) practically similar suggestions about them,’ he envisages.



Rinrigaku no hanashi (A Talk about Ethics) which composes of three chapters: ‘what science is ethics?’, ‘foundation of ethic (moral)’ and ‘on justice’

THE DIVIDE BRIDGED

Shinagawa's research is particularly important in the context of an increasingly globalised world and a growing chasm between rich and poor. At the core of the work is an acute awareness of human vulnerability and a desire to promote a better understanding of society. 'The concept of justice assumes that society consists of self-sufficient, autonomous and equal members. This understanding, according to ethics of care, loses sight of human vulnerability. This critique is also applied to contemporary individualistic and competitive society,' Shinagawa states. The research is exploring all of these interrelated ideas and concepts, as well as connected challenges, including questions of economy, welfare and identity.

The work is related to fields beyond philosophy and ethics, including politics, law and economics, making it highly interdisciplinary. 'Aiding the needy is not only an issue in ethics, but also in politics, law and economics,' states Shinagawa. Each of these fields has its own values independent from ethical judgment. For example, legitimacy of procedure in politics, coherence among laws and judgements in law, and cost-benefit analysis in economics. 'But ethical judgments are also made in

each of these fields. By contrast ethics can be called the most abstract normative theory because it deals with ethical judgments without being limited to a specific field such as politics, law, economics and so on.' This research, therefore, leads to an interdisciplinary study.

SUPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING

Shinagawa's research challenges certain views of society, and this is one of the reasons he is so interested in philosophy – it delves deeper into situations and ideas to find new meanings and/or outlooks. It also hopes to enhance understanding of ethics. 'I hope that my studies will change the too narrow understanding of ethics. At first, an unreal division is often made between public and private domains and a prejudice is often assumed that ethics based on justice and right is applied to the former and ethics of care to the latter,' says Shinagawa. 'Raising children, nursing and caring for the aged are no longer only done in families, but also in public domains such as in nursery schools, hospitals and homes for the elderly. Private issues are also very often public issues at once. Secondly, there is a deep-rooted inclination to try to exclude metaphysical inquiry from ethics.' This research tackles a social and actual issue of aiding the needy. 'It might appear to be

possible to do so without metaphysics but this unearths metaphysical questions such as 'what is a human being?', 'why do we live together?', 'is any significance found in the fact that we are here now together by chance?' he outlines.

Ultimately, Shinagawa wants to promote a shift in mindset and improved understanding of ethics that will lead to a better society in which human vulnerability is acknowledged and vulnerable people are supported. This will prove beneficial not only for people in need as well as the people caring for them, but also for all possibly vulnerable persons, namely, everyone. ●

Project Insights

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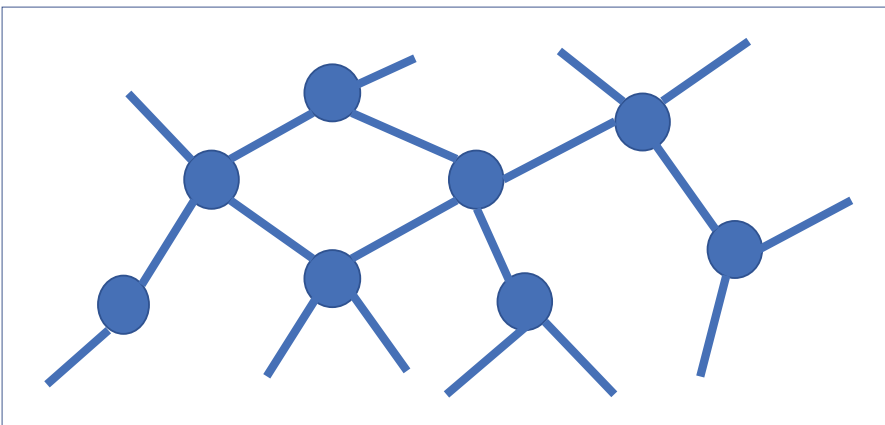
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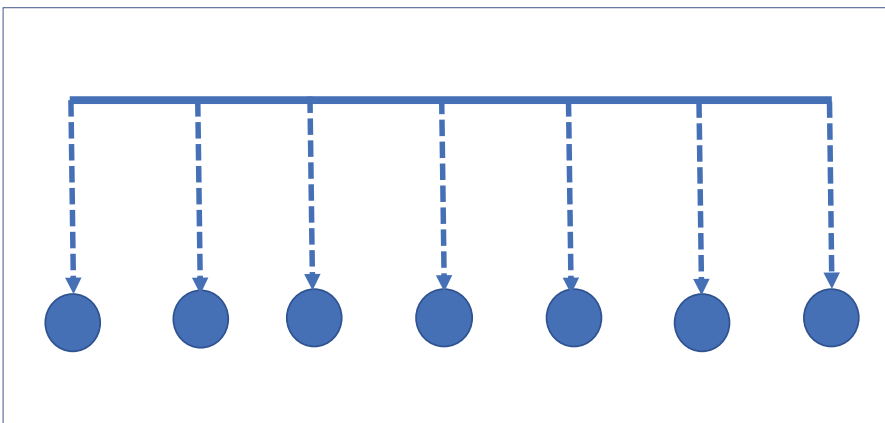
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BIO

Professor Tetsuhiko Shinagawa studied Husserl's phenomenology at Kyoto University, after which he set towards applied ethics in the 1980s, when bioethics and environmental ethics began to be vigorously researched in Japan. He gradually enlarged the research field to ethics in general and especially tackled the foundation of ethics. He is the author of *Introduction to Ethics: From Aristotle to Reproductive Technology and AI* (Chuokoron-shinsha, 2020), *A Talk about Ethics* (Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2015) and *What Borders Justice: The Principle of Responsibility and Ethic of Care* (Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2007), which are written in Japanese. Shinagawa has been a Professor at Kansai University since 2000.



The image of universality in ethic of care. Weaving a network within which everyone is cared for by someone



The image of universality in ethic of justice. The same principle is applied to everyone equally

