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The University of Osaka

# Clinical Philosophy Program of Osaka University

## — Its History, Educational Program and Key Notions for the Practice

Naoki Homma

### 1. Outline of Clinical Philosophy

#### 1.1. Beginning

*Clinical philosophy* was first advocated by a Professor of Philosophy, a Japanese phenomenologist, *Kiyokazu Washida*, seeking the potential of philosophical thinking situated in our actual life. By “clinical philosophy” Washida means “philosophy on the spot of suffering”, suffering, not only in the field of medicine or nursing, but also in other fields and situations. The word ‘clinical’ comes from the Greek word ‘klinikos’ which means ‘at the bed side’.

In the 1990s, the idea of applied philosophy and ethics were introduced into Japanese academic philosophy. It was, in fact, a challenge to Japanese academic philosophers who had acquiesced back into traditional Eastern and Western philosophy. Prof. Washida emphasized that clinical philosophy is not a type of applied philosophy or ethics, but rather is against the idea of application, which presupposes certain principles being established. He writes in his first book on clinical philosophy that *Listening* and *Co-presence* can be a leading concept for this new philosophy. It is also a counterpoint to modern Western philosophy, which he viewed as being based on a disembodied concept of speaking, judging and willing.

#### 1.2. The Course in Clinical Philosophy in Graduate School (Since 1998-)

After several years of preparation, Prof. Washida, together with his colleague Prof. *Narifumi Nakaoka*, started an official course in clinical philosophy at *The Osaka University Graduate School of Letters* in 1998. Along with traditional philosophy and ethics classes, the clinical philosophy seminar was held every Friday evening. Nurses,

teachers, and people from other fields attend it as well as students. Care or Caring has been one of the main topics in the seminar. Besides that, a research group is working on the problems of education in Japanese society. They are also discussing the philosophy of education with school students.

Soon after starting the clinical philosophy course at Osaka University, teaching staff and students set about exchanging ideas amongst people who practice philosophy in various countries and areas. Some are strongly interested in activities, such as *Philosophical Practice* (Consultation/Counseling), *Philosophy for Children*, *Neo-Socratic Dialogue* and *Philosophical Café*, and 'try out' philosophy for themselves. With the help of Dutch, German and French practitioners, associate Professor *Naoki Homma* and his students started researches in these philosophical practices and carry out them mainly in the form of group session: Neo-Socratic (Nelsonian) Dialogue (1999~), Philosophical Café (2000~), Philosophy in School (philosophy with children and teens) (2003~) and Group Consultation (2010~). Homma is in charge of training seminars in this course.

When Prof. Washida arrived at the president of Osaka University in 2008, *Shinji Hamauzu* replaced him as a Professor in this course and has developed in his own way the phenomenology of care that would comprehend problems and difficulties in our lives as birth, aging, sickness and death (these four aspects are inspired by "four sufferings" of Buddhism).



The first Philosophical Café at *Outen'in* Buddhist temple in 2000

### 1.3. Educational program

Generally, students are required to achieve 32 credits before they finish their master's thesis in the Graduate School of Letters. All the teaching staff of the department of clinical philosophy gives lectures and seminars based on their own specialism. Practical training is not required for all students in clinical philosophy. Some can finish this course after theoretical investigations only. Clinical philosophy students undertake three kinds of classes as follows:

*Theoretical Studies:* Every student studies classical texts or contemporary studies written by Western and Japanese modern philosophers and prepares for the thesis for a masters or doctoral degree. Learning traditional philosophy aims to help them to reflect on concrete problems.

*Training Seminar for Philosophical Dialogue and Facilitation:* students experience philosophical dialogue and learn how to hold philosophical inquiry sessions with different kinds of people. They learn basic skills through a variety of practices such as Community of Inquiry (Philosophy for/with Children), Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue, and Mutual Questioning (a technique developed by *Oscar Brenifier*).

*Service Learning Program:* "Service learning" is a method of teaching that combines instruction with a related service in the community. Students try practicing philosophical café or group consultation in various situations under the supervision of the teaching staff.



Scenes from the training seminar for philosophical dialogue and facilitation: Students learn Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue (left) and Community of Inquiry (right).



A student animates a philosophical café with people with disability (left) and facilitates a group dialogue for multi-cultural understanding (both in community center).

## 2. Association and Collaboration in- and outside Osaka University

### 2.1. Café-Philo (Japan)

In 2005, Café-Philo (Japan) was founded an association for philosophical practice by members of clinical philosophy and its supporters. This association is the first of its kind and unique to Japan. Practitioners who learned philosophical dialogue and its facilitation

carry out hundreds of group sessions (Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue, Philosophical Café and Community of Inquiry), workshops and seminars in the community. Recently, Café-Philo focuses on networking independent philosophers who attempt to create a job by philosophical practice.



A workshop with artwork for school children (left) and community of inquiry seminar for adults (right)

## 2.2. Center for the Study of Communication-Design

Center for the Study of Communication-Design (CSCD) was created in Osaka University under the leadership of Ex-president Prof. Washida in 2005. This center focuses on communicational competence and liberal education, mainly targeted at the graduate school level. Staff members from diverse fields of study have created an original education program with a long-term perspective, aimed at developing abilities in communication at between research sites fields (especially field research), and for building human resources that can enable interactive problem solving through dialogue. One of the clinical philosophy staff (Homma) holds an additional post in this center and organizes a university-community relations program named *Nakanoshima College of Philosophy*. This program is held every two weeks at the train station in Osaka City and open to everybody. A number of experimental seminars, philosophical cafés and workshop are planned and moderated by graduate students as a part of their on-the-job training, and independent philosophers often play an active part in this program.



Scenes from *Nakanoshima College of Philosophy* (in the train station)

A seminar for/with sexual minorities (left) and a philosophical café for women (right)

## 2.3. Collaboration with Organizations

Students who belong to a clinical philosophy course and members of Café-Philo hold seminars and workshops for various kinds of people in collaboration with organizations. Most of them are nonprofit organizations and supporting organizations that engage in supporting social minorities. Besides, Café-Philo programs seminars and consultation for professionals, especially medical staffs.



Immigrants talking about their lives (In a philosophical café in collaboration with Minoh Association for Global Awareness)

## 3. Key Notions for the Practice

### 3.1. Dialogue and Co-inquiry

Clinical philosophy is an alternative to the Western philosophical tradition that places



undue emphasis on monological thinking and impersonal rationality. As Hannah Arendt shows in her Book *Life of the Mind*, thinking as an activity has a tendency to withdraw from the world in which we ourselves live with others. Her idea of the *world of appearances* is very important both in a theoretical and practical sense, because philosophical thinking is not a retreat from the world but an experience through and with our bodily existence. Thinking with others through dialogue is the eminent experience that discloses who we are as social human beings. Through dialogue, I appear to the other and the other appears to me even when each of them thinks for themselves. Thinking is an activity being both with myself and with others. In other words, dialogue is the manner in which we approach co-inquiry in common place and time.

Indeed, practices with group such as Philosophical Cafe, Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue, Philosophy for/with Children, can be different varieties of co-inquiry. When inquiry get started, people become more than participants. They belong to a emerging community. The notion of *community of inquiry* comes from Charles Sanders Peirce's idea and Matthew Lipman, who had a good reason to introduce it into philosophy in school.

### **3.2. A physically, emotionally and intellectually safe place and the care of the self**

A certain type of place is necessary but not sufficient to go into co-inquiry. According to Thomas Jackson who practices philosophical inquiry with children in Hawai'i, *physically, emotionally and intellectually safe places* are indispensable for our philosophical life. He said, "Anyone who knows how to pretend they understand something even though they don't, or who has been in a context where they had a question but were afraid to ask it, has felt the influence of a place that was not intellectually safe. *Intellectual safety* is the bedrock upon which inquiry grows." Our understanding is so vulnerable like our body that any kind of attack, criticism and negation from others would discourage our attempt at co-inquiry. The inquiry with children teaches us that the intellectual safety is not only for children but also for everyone.

Taking care of our intellectual safety has a close connection with self-awareness.



Neither a offensive nor a defensive attitude brings us such safety. A safe place is a condition under which we can be true to ourselves. Telling the truth about oneself is one of most significant practices for philosophy, traditionally called, “the practice of the self” or “the care of the self.” (Michel Foucault) If someone wants to tell the truth about him or herself, he or she needs others who listen to him/her carefully, and he or she has to prepare for change both for others and him- or herself. The safe place is the “bedrock” upon which our inquiry into ourselves is founded.

### **3.3. Transformation and emancipation**

The transformation of our way of being through inquiry is the aim of the philosophical practice. Dialogue as philosophical inquiry can be distinguished from discussion or debate, because the philosophical practice is a self-transformative activity and no one knows beforehand to where this inquiry takes us. This self-transformation is also distinguished from problem solution, negotiation and compromise. Understanding through inquiry implies the fact that we have yet to reach the limit of our knowledge. But it is still knowledge of a special kind. We call it “insight”.

Deep insights lead us to emancipate the self from ignorance, stiffness and captivity. We have some complex beliefs and assumptions that tie ourselves, without knowing it. It is not easy for us to undo and untie them. Co-inquiry or a community of inquiry is important here again, because our understanding of the world is built in certain social settings and our understanding of ourselves also is woven from ideas and words from others. Co-inquiry creates a safe place where we can loosen our ties with the help of others.

### **Note**

This is a manuscript for an invited lecture at the 5th International Conference on Humanities Therapy held in May 30-31, 2013 in Kangwon National University, Chuncheon, Republic of Korea. The focus of this lecture was on the educational program for the philosophical practice. I would like to give thanks to Michael Gillan Peckitt and Minae Inahara for correcting this text.