

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



Thursday, 4 February 2016, 18.30 h

Ralf Stoecker
(Bielefeld University)
together with Miki Aoyama (DIJ)

What is human dignity? And could it provide a common ethical foundation between cultures? The examples of Germany and Japan

Immediately after World War II the concept of human dignity took off for a steep career in international and constitutional law. Already in the UN Charter (1945) and in the universal declaration of human rights (1948), and from then on in almost every human rights declaration and national constitution, human dignity occupied a prominent position. This is particularly evident in the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz), where the very first article is devoted to the “Würde des Menschen” (human dignity), as being the foundation of the human rights.

Despite the prominence of human dignity many philosophers have difficulties with this concept. They usually don't know how to construe it and how to relate it to the already well received idea of human rights. Therefore, many of today's moral philosophers (et al. Macklin 2003) dismiss the concept of human dignity entirely.

This skeptical move, however, may be premature. In the talk, Ralf Stoecker will suggest an answer to the question of what human dignity is and why it should be taken seriously in moral philosophy. One reason is that it shows promise for bridging ethical differences between societies with rather different cultural backgrounds. In the last part of the lecture, Miki Aoyama will illustrate this claim with a closer look at the concept and at the role of human dignity in Japan.

Ralf Stoecker is Professor of philosophy at Bielefeld University in Germany. Currently he is guest professor at Sophia University. Stoecker has been working and publishing on different topics in philosophical ethics and action theory, e.g. on human dignity, personhood, life and death, intentionality and causation. He is one of the editors of the comprehensive “Handbuch Angewandte Ethik (Stuttgart 2011).

Miki Aoyama is a Senior Research Fellow at the DIJ. Previously, she was a researcher at the University of Würzburg and Tübingen and a member of the DFG research group "Culture-transcending Bioethics. Conditions, Prospects, and Challenges" on intercultural questions of bioethics.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is organized by Miki Aoyama-Olschina and Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration (aoyama@dijtokyo.org) is greatly appreciated.

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