

# A Buddhist Critique of the So-called “Dignity of Life” and “Death with Dignity” from the Perspective of Temporality

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## 국문 초록

본 연구는 『아함경』으로 알려진 불교 문헌에 근거하여 ‘삶의 존엄성’과 ‘존엄사’를 시간성의 관점에서 비판적으로 탐구하려는 것이다. 관련 주제에 대한 분석은 ‘존엄성’, ‘삶’, ‘죽음’과 같은 몇 가지 핵심 개념을 정의하고 명확히 하는 것에서 시작한다. 그 후 존엄성을 삶이나 죽음과 연결하는 것이 적절한가에 대한 비판적인 검토가 이어진다. 강조하려는 요점은 비록 존엄성이라는 개념이 시간적인 맥락 속에서 경험되는 사회적이고 문화적인 범주에서는 중요한 역할을 할 수 있지만, 시간성이 결여된 생사의 과정(윤회)이라는 범주에서는 매우 큰 어려움에 직면한다는 것이다. 만일 ‘삶의 존엄성’과 ‘존엄사’라는 문구가 당연한 것으로 받아들여진다면, 잘못된 용어 적용 범주의 오류를 범하게 될 수 있고, 따라서 생명윤리나 생사학의 상호 연관된 담론은 우리를 기만하거나 오도할지도 모르는 것이다. 나는 생사의 과정(윤회)이 무엇보다 존엄성이나 모욕에 관한 것이 아니라, 오히려 우리가 간혀 있는 괴로움과 그 간혀 있는 괴로움의 지멸에 관한 것이라고 주장한다. 본 연구의 비판적 통찰은 삶과 죽음의 어려운 상황에 대처하도록 철학도의 마음을 열어 줄 수 있을 뿐 아니라, 삶과 죽음의 철학과 관련된 향후 연구에 있어 지침이 될 수 있을 것이다.

키워드: 시간성, 존엄, 삶, 죽음, 괴로움, 생사학

## I. Introduction

The world in which sentient beings live has been one of the main focuses and characteristic features of philosophical inquiry. Buddhist scriptures contain various teachings and discussions on critical and significant questions that philosophers have raised about the roots, arising, trends, mechanism, and reality of the world. Aiming at constructing a Buddhist philosophy of space-time from the perspective of temporality, this paper mainly focuses on the issue of the reality of the world and the way in which the reality of the world is demonstrated.

The following four concepts need to be defined and clarified in order to better understand and communicate the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

- (1) Dignity: “In its most general form, we can understand the *concept* of dignity to be a respect-worthy status or standing.”<sup>1)</sup> According to such a definition, dignity is a status-term and is related to a certain group or community. Besides, as worthy of respect by others, dignity can function as a tool for elevating or degrading one’s status in a certain group or community.
- (2) Life: In terms of phenomenal world, life is regarded as the process of life throughout various moments of birth, growth, aging, sickness, and death. Concerning individual entities, life is referred to as living individuals. As regards the fundamental reality of sentient beings, life is understood as “a coherent base, mechanism, or principle which

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1) Formosa 2017, 4.

manifests living as such a process of life.”<sup>2)</sup>

- (3) Death: Since the notion of break-up and disintegration of the constitutive elements of the psycho-physical individual characterizes death, “death is the irreversible loss of integrated organic functioning.”<sup>3)</sup> The traditional Buddhist criteria that distinguish a living body from a dead body include life/vitality-faculty (*āyu*), heat (*usmā*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).<sup>4)</sup>
- (4) Temporality: The two most common definitions of the word “temporality” are either “of or relating to time rather than eternity,” or “of or relating to secular life as distinguished from what pertains to the sacred.” In this paper, temporality is introduced to highlight the temporal character of the actual world, namely, that whatever we experience, we experience as impermanent: Everything changes over time, and everyone dies. In other words, everything is in a state of flux, and nothing lasts forever.<sup>5)</sup>

## II. Dignity of Life: The Connection of Dignity with Life

The concept of dignity in its common usage can be connected with many terms to express various views. Example one: the “dignity of work,” also known as the “dignity of labor,” is a view that all kinds of jobs are respected equally, and there is no superior or inferior work.<sup>6)</sup> Example two: the “dignity

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2) Tsai 2008, 176.

3) Keown 2010, 14.

4) Cf. Harvey 2000, 306-309.

5) For a more detailed discussion of the concept of temporality and its relevance to and role in Buddhist philosophy, see Tsai 2020, 20-25.

6) ‘Work is an expression of personal dignity and self-realization. The right to the dignity of work is one of the most fundamental expressions of human worth. It is the right to perform constructive, purposeful action, and work is thus a defining characteristic of human identity. To

of the human person,” also known as the “human dignity,” is “a moral world view that contains a particular cultural understanding of human moral worth and his proper relations with society.”<sup>7)</sup> In other words, the concept of human dignity is used to justify that every human person deserves to be treated with respect and to be valued as a part of humanity. Although many more examples could be given, this section will focus on the connection of dignity with life and examine whether the phrase “dignity of life” can be accepted as metaphysical truth. In this regard, the following four questions are worthwhile to investigate.

### 1. How Appropriate Is the Phrase “Dignity of Life”: A Philosophical Concept in Its Own Right or a Belief Enmeshed with Political Correctness?

Philosophy is neither content with beliefs, nor does it take the presuppositions underlying any social systems or legal orders for granted. If beliefs and presuppositions are unexamined but simply uncritically accepted, human thinking tends to become ossified, and human thoughts continue to be clouded by delusions. Through rigorous investigation, an understanding of the truth about the world is crucial to attain wisdom and live in a wise manner.

The phrase “dignity of life,” or “human dignity,” often “forms a foundational concept for the international legal order of human rights.”<sup>8)</sup> Largely due to the widespread influence of contemporary political and legal movements associated with the idea of human rights, the phrase “human dignity” gains positive recognition with fashion. In the same vein, the phrase “dignity of life” is not so much an appropriate representation of the reality

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deny this right to others is to deny their dignity and also to deprive society of the benefit of their potential’ (Naraine 2004, 96).

7) Shultziner 2007, 90.

8) Mahlmann 2012, 371.

as a dogmatic expression of beliefs and enforced conformity of thoughts.<sup>9)</sup> However, if an idea is accepted predominantly through enforced conformity and political correctness, this is tantamount to the death of philosophy therein.<sup>10)</sup>

## 2. Dignity as a Temporal and Social Construct, How about Life?

Since the idea of the “dignity of life” plays a fundamental and significant role in many aspects of contemporary society, it deserves philosophical reflection, which can start by looking into the connection of dignity with life. In other words, it is time that we treat “dignity of life” as a philosophical concept in its own right that is separate from the shelter of political correctness, for by doing so we may actually uncover and look beyond the veil of “dignity of life.”

However, closer scrutiny reveals that the appropriateness of the phrase “dignity of life” can be gravely challenged. Such a phrase seems to be fraught with severe problems in connecting two concepts, i.e., dignity and life, derived from discrete categories, and in understanding the truth about the world as well.

If one regards dignity as an attribute of the dignified, such dignity must be a product of temporal activities in a social context.<sup>11)</sup> The point is that one expresses one’s acknowledgement of other people’s dignity by respecting them and even by honoring them. Since dignity means that people are to be treated with respect, it is temporal, social and cultural in nature.

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9) Literally, enforced conformity is the imposition of the principles of conformity and order on people to behave and/or think in a certain way - the exact same way.

10) For example: ‘Where there was enforced conformity there was intellectual sterility’ (MacIntyre 2011, 105).

11) For example: ‘Dignity differs from pride, self-esteem, or even self-realization because dignity only develops from social relations of mutual respect, from the various actions which not only provide dignity, but bring dignity to others’ (Langman and Lundskow 2016, 294).

Being social means performing social actions. However, people do various kinds of things, and a large part of them are really bad and even cruel or evil ones, which, by definition, do not deserve respect. Therefore, as time goes by, the same person might earn other people's respect to the dignified person, but later might become a disgrace or an embarrassment to society for whatever reason.

Since the phrase “dignity of life” universally and permanently applies to all the forms of sentient beings, at least to all human beings, it is hard to imagine how this phrase can make any sense while applying to those who carry out bad, abusive, or even evil behaviors.<sup>12)</sup> Furthermore, if the lives are already dignified creatures in their essential nature, how can they become dignified again by way of earning the respect of others? There is something questionable about this dignity and it does not actually help in solving the problem by resorting to a distinction between dignified conduct and dignified creatures.<sup>13)</sup>

Here comes the big dilemma about the dignity of life. If life is both temporal and social, the connection of dignity with life will encounter enormous difficulties while applying to bad or even evil deeds. If life is neither temporal nor social, it is philosophically illegitimate to attach such a socio-temporal term as dignity to life due to categorical discrepancy between dignity and life. Therefore, the dignity of life can hardly be a valid claim no matter from which angle it is viewed.

### 3. Where Does the Dignity of Life Come From?

If dignity is connected with a certain person or group of persons within a specified period of time, it will be relatively easy, just as many people would do it, to ascribe such dignity to either some moral qualities or the

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12) Just because someone does not deserve to be respected, it does not mean that person deserves disrespect or discrimination. There is always room for compassion, learning, and improvement.

13) For a distinction between dignified conduct and dignified creatures, see Darby 2018, 174.

mechanism of social rewards such as prestige and status.<sup>14)</sup> However, if the idea of the dignity of life is regarded as the universal and permanent foundation of social order, humanity, values, or morality, it would certainly encounter enormous difficulties in indifferently ascribing such dignity to any worldly entities or entities from other worlds. Some of the difficulties involved therein are quite unavoidable owing to the universal and permanent bestowal of dignity regardless of whether it is worthwhile to confer dignity on such and such virtues or persons in a temporal context.

This explains why the idea of the dignity of life is simply assumed without further investigation, justification or discussion in most of the mainstream theories of relevant ethics, sociology, jurisprudence, or international relations.<sup>15)</sup> However, if the dignity of life cannot be appropriately justified in terms of the process of the origin of life, such an idea is not to be taken for granted, given that alternative ideas may be much better founded to deal with bioethical issues.

The topic of the origin of life cannot be avoided if the dignity of life is to be applied and maintained universally and permanently. In other words, if one advocates the dignity of life in a universal and permanent manner, he/she has to explain why the life, or at least human life, has an inherent dignity in terms of how sentient beings, or at least human beings, came to be. In this regard, among those who propose the dignity of life, however, the topic of the origin of life is either ignored or turned into theological clichés.<sup>16)</sup>

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14) Cf. Barreto 2009, 46-47; Stadler 2011, 104.

15) See e.g., Reis Monteiro 2014, 241-245.

16) Example one: 'All human life has an inherent dignity, and, therefore, all human life deserves respect. We call this principle the *respect and dignity clause*. What this clause means is that, in a fundamental and non-negotiable way, no human life is worth more than another; because of this, each human life has the same inherent dignity and that dignity requires that we respect that life' (Cirrone 2015, 7).

Example two: 'Modern declarations of human rights have frequently repeated that human life and dignity are inherently connected. The concept of human dignity refers to the inner spirit of Human Rights. Most states consider it their duty to advocate the dignity of man. As stated

No reason is really given for claiming the dignity of life other than resorting to theological clichés and simplifications. The process of the temporal life of the mind-body complex cannot be replaced with routinized clichés. Without pertinent observation of the temporal process of sentient beings, the idea of the dignity of life is nothing but a dogmatic view.

#### 4. What Are the Appropriate and Consistent Criteria for Life to be Dignified?

Dignity is a value-loaded concept, involving value judgment in terms of both quality and quantity and referring to something which is either more or less dignified than others.<sup>17)</sup> The primary difficulty with such a concept as dignity is that value judgment cannot proceed appropriately without criteria.<sup>18)</sup>

What are the appropriate and consistent criteria for value judgments applicable to a dignified life? Are value judgments rationally justifiable? Such questions will probably not receive much attention when dignity is associated with discrete phenomena within the boundaries of a well-established tradition. However, when dignity is universally and fundamentally connected with life, any tradition, be it theological, cultural, or societal, can no longer automatically function as the criterion for a dignified life.

Some of the severe problems associated with the discourses on the dignity of life include, first, avoiding or withdrawing from philosophizing this problem of criteria, and second, treating this problem of criteria as if it were some exterior phenomena within a given time period and within a given area.

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in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) the recognition of the inherent dignity is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (preamble)' (Ziebertz and Reindl 2013, 119).

17) Concerning dignity and value, see Hicks 2011, 1-23.

18) Concerning value judgment and criteria in bioethics, see Duff 2013, 176-177; Schafer 1992, 211-213.



If most of the discourses on the dignity of life only reflect either the dominant social conventions, power structures, or personal tastes without appropriate and consistent criteria, such discourses, no matter how sophisticated they may appear to be, are not good enough to be accepted as philosophical knowledge in a rigorous sense.

### III. Death with Dignity: The Connection of Dignity with Death

The previously stated philosophical problems due to the connection of dignity with life are also applicable to the connection of dignity with death, which is often termed as “death with dignity.”<sup>19)</sup> As a side note, although the connection of dignity with life commonly underlies current political thoughts or legal theories, the connection of dignity with death is more often seen in bioethics, especially in its sub-category of euthanasia.<sup>20)</sup> It is exactly in such multivalent connections to various fields that, on the one hand, the meaning of dignity becomes vaguer, on the other hand, the reality of life-and-death becomes further clouded and distorted by conceptual vagueness and rival opinions.

I would like to emphasize once again that dignity basically means worthy, especially worthy of respect by others.<sup>21)</sup> Dignity or worthy in Buddhism is not built-in; it is to be earned. One is worthy mainly because of what one does or how one does it. In other words, one has to base one’s worth

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19) For a reflection on the “dignity of life” and the “dignity of death” from a different perspective, see Noys 2005, 93-94.

20) Cf. Hillyard and Dombrink 2001.

21) The sanskrit equivalent of dignity is *gurutva* (respectability, venerableness), although other terms are used, e.g., *māhātmya* (exalted state or position, majesty) and *mahanīya* (worthy of honour, respectable, exalted). In Buddhism, the common term for worthy is *arhat* (a present participle of the verbal root √arh “to deserve”) or *arhya* (a future passive participle of the verbal root √arh “to deserve”). Cf. Anālayo 2017.

on one's deeds, qualities, and abilities considered by a large portion of individuals in a community to be respectable. If worthy can be universally applied to anyone regardless of what or how one does things, this is tantamount to ruining worthy as a philosophical concept.<sup>22)</sup> Once the concept of worthy is ruined, the concomitant concept of dignity goes to ruin too.

In bioethics, most of the discourses on the “dignity of death,” “death with dignity,” or a “dignified death” take dignity as a given and therefore apply universally to the death of humans.<sup>23)</sup> The meaning of dignity in such discourses has thus been substantially changed and has become perhaps virtually undefinable – a concept has evolved into a symbol which can easily be equated with “physician assisted suicide” or “aid in dying.”<sup>24)</sup>

This paper, however, does not intend to address the complex issues involved in euthanasia, physician assisted suicide, or aid in dying,<sup>25)</sup> yet focuses on how the concept of dignity has become a cliché to the point of losing its philosophical significance, which has been substituted by conventionalized linguistic usage or even preconceived ideology. In light of the current situation, there is no need to delve into the discourses on dignity as a first resort. With the suspension of dignity, an investigation of life-and-death is not only possible, but more plausible.

#### IV. Neither Dignity nor Indignity, but Rather Suffering: A Buddhist Perspective on Life-and-Death in Terms of Temporality

Most theistic religions tend to lay deity-related terms on top of the life world. Besides, a majority of the publications of systematic philosophy are

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22) I borrowed the idea of the ruin of conceptual logic from Hägglund 2008, 179.

23) For example: Keegan and Drick 2011, 19-33.

24) Cf. Biggs 2001, 29-33.

25) Cf. O'Rourke 2017; Reagan 2003; Simmons 2018.

inclined to build philosophical systems by means of conceptual analysis and propositional reasoning. In consequence, the harsh realities of temporal life get buried under layers and layers of conceptualizations and conflicting views. However, a rigorous inquiry into life can and should begin by observing the impermanent process of life-and-death while endeavouring to suspend one-sided views and superimposed ideologies.

## 1. An Observation of the Impermanent Process of Life-and-Death as the First Step in Reaching a Correct Understanding

The process of life-and-death of humans and non-human animals is characteristic of impermanence. The observation of this impermanent process is conducive to a better understanding of the entrapped suffering conditions of living in the world, i.e., the conditions of being entrapped in the life journey of birth, aging, sickness, and death.<sup>26)</sup> What exactly are the entrapped suffering conditions (Skt. *duḥkha*/ Pāli, *dukkha*)? Sentient beings are born to the world with little understanding of why or how they were born, and therefore live with little control over how their life will turn out. After the birth, sentient beings cannot help but keep growing and changing throughout an entire lifetime while being ignorant of the causes and effects along with the journey of a lifetime, and therefore to a large extent lack the knowledge and skill to correctly and effectively stop or terminate the life's journey at any time. Moreover, whether sentient beings like it or not, aging, illness, and death have to be faced and defused. From the perspective of sequentially riding life's ups and downs, entrapped suffering is almost all that remains for ordinary sentient beings with gloomy prospects for the future.<sup>27)</sup>

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26) Concerning entrapped suffering, see Tsai 2013, 125, 130.

27) For example: 'And what is suffering, what is the origin of suffering, what is the cessation of suffering, what is the way leading to the cessation of suffering? Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair

In view of the impermanent and harsh process of life-and-death, it is crucial that a rigorous philosophy of life-and-death should first and foremost probe deep into the causes and conditions of the entrapped suffering. In this regard, the causes and conditions are not to be sought from external phenomena such as social, political, economic, or environmental situations; they should mainly be sought in the bodily, verbal, and mental actions throughout both mental stream (*citta-santati*; *citta-santāna*) and the process of the temporal life. In conformity with this basic re-orientation of inquiry, not only a correct understanding of the entrapped suffering but also the complete cessation of the suffering-laden rebirth process can be accomplished with the aid of understanding and ceasing the very causes and conditions that bring sentient beings into existence.<sup>28)</sup>

## 2. From Entrapped Suffering to Mindfulness, Clear Comprehension, and Liberation

As I highlighted previously, the process of life-and-death is basically neither about dignity nor about indignity. Rather, it is about entrapped suffering and the cessation of the entrapped suffering. This thesis can be enumerated as follows.

To begin with, if one gets hold of the idea of the “dignity of life,” he/she is inclined to either adopt a socially oriented lifestyle in relation to his/her journey of a lifetime<sup>29)</sup> or get involved in a lifestyle directed toward some sort of the “projected Other,” e.g., God or the “absolute Other” as

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are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering. This is called suffering’ (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, ‘MN 9: *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* – Right View’, 2005, 134-135). See also T. 1, no. 26, 462a.

28) Cf. Anderson 1999; Bodhi 2010.

29) If a lifestyle is socially oriented, the typical style of behavior, thoughts, interests, and habits of a particular person or group of people is positioned toward social interaction and is contextualized within a social domain.

Emmanuel Levinas sometimes puts it.<sup>30)</sup> Such viewpoints may face a twofold problem with regard to the way philosophy is construed and approached. On the one hand, since dignity is mainly a social construct, the idea of the “dignity of life” will be contributive to a socially oriented lifestyle and will be positioned away from the impermanent process of life-and-death. On the other hand, if dignity is somehow ascribed to the “projected Other,” the idea of the “dignity of life” will shift focus away from the impermanent process of life-and-death too. However, when the impermanent process of life-and-death is badly out of the focus of attention and observation, the so-called “dignity of life” appears to be nothing but a vacuous slogan.

Furthermore, if one gets hold of the idea of “death with dignity,” he/she, under the influence of the modern global human rights movement, most likely has a certain preference for euthanasia. In this framework, the connection of dignity with death is simply accepted and then exploited to endorse decisions in relation to a civil rights agenda with little assessment of the validity and reliability of such an idea. In other words, although the idea of “death with dignity” may be effective in grabbing people’s attention and accelerating momentum for legalization, it is a philosophically unfounded assumption based on theological beliefs or wishful thinking.

Finally, Buddhist scriptures not only emphasize pertinent observation and correct understanding of the impermanent process of life-and-death, but also propose practical measures that, at least throughout an entire lifetime, address the problem of suffering and enhance the mental power requisite to overcome suffering. In short, the issues of temporal constraints such as aging, illness, and death play a fundamental role in a lifetime. Without ways to cope with and go beyond these issues, living in the world can be hurtful and even devastating. However, both the ideas of “dignity of life” and “death with dignity” do not come face to face with temporal constraints of sentient beings. On the contrary, these two ideas disguise suffering with dignity. The

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30) Levinas 1991, 38, 49, 61. Cf. Zahavi 2003, 4.

problem is that maybe people can live with concealed suffering, but, like concealed depression, suffering, in this fashion, can neither be appropriately understood nor overcome at its roots.

Following direct confrontation with suffering and real effort to probe into the sources of suffering, there are many teachings in Buddhist scriptures that propose practical measures especially for practitioners struck with a serious and painful illness. For example, in the introductory section of the *Samyutta-nikāya* 36.7 “*Paṭhama-gelaṅṅa-sutta* - The Sick Ward (1),” the Buddha went to the sick ward, and addressed the bhikkhus thus:

Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu should await his time mindful and clearly comprehending. This is our instruction to you.<sup>31)</sup>

The above guideline was proposed to provide guidance for seriously ill and dying practitioners. Three key points can be highlighted.

First, one should await his/her time (*kālaṃ āgameyya*).<sup>32)</sup> On condition of birth (*jāti*), aging and death (*jarā-marāṇa*) will arise sooner or later. From this perspective of conditioned co-arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), it is counterproductive to fear or hate death. Similarly, it is not advisable to attempt suicide or request euthanasia. However, this does not mean that one just keeps waiting and ends up doing nothing.

Second, a basic practice for a person, even very sick or dying, to maintain a solid mindset is staying mindful (*sata*).<sup>33)</sup> Mindfulness is a way to steady the mind from the ground up and to maintain aware of the actual activities of one’s body, feelings, mind, and related factors.<sup>34)</sup> By staying mindful, one

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31) Bodhi 2000, 1266. Cf. T. 2, no. 99, 268b-269a.

32) *kālaṃ* (masculine, accusative, singular of *kāla*): time, a euphemism for death. *āgameyya* (causative, optative, parasmaipada, second person, singular of *ā-√gam*): come. *kālaṃ āgameyya*: let the time come; await death to come.

33) *sata* (past passive participle of *√smṛ*): mindful, remembering. *sati* (feminine): attentive awareness, mindfulness, recollection.

34) For a quick explanation of how mindfulness works, see Tsai 2020, 11-14.

can not only reduce stress and anxiety, avoid the tendency of being overly overwhelmed by what is happening around oneself, but also overcome covetousness and grief.<sup>35)</sup>

Third, along the way of mindfulness, a practitioner will be able to further develop insight capability and dwell clearly comprehending (*sampajāna*).<sup>36)</sup> As a side note, clear comprehension, in this context, is not just about being attentive in the present moment. It is more about correctly understanding the nature or meaning of the moment-to-moment activities and related happenings, which, according to the “*Paṭhama-gelaṅṅa-sutta*” and many other *suttas* in the *Nikāya* collections, are impermanent (*anicca*), compounded (*saṅkhata*), conditioned co-arisen (*paṭicca-samuppanna*), and also vanishing (*vaya*), fading away (*virāga*), cessation (*nirodha*), and relinquishment (*paṭinissagga*). In this respect, even the seriously ill still have a way out of suffering through clear comprehension that illness and related feelings – be they pleasant (*sukha*), painful (*dukkha*), or neither-painful-nor-pleasant (*adukkha-m-asukha*) – are on the one hand conditioned co-arisen but are, on the other hand, cessation in nature. It is exactly by way of understanding the cessation of life-and-death that the liberation (*vimutti*) from suffering can eventually be realized.

## V. Conclusion

I have argued that “dignity of life” and “death with dignity” are misplaced categories of terminological application in the discourses of philosophy of life-and-death. Without both pertinent observation of the impermanent process of life-and-death and rigorous training in meta-philosophy to guide our perception and thinking, it is easy to get trapped by the kinds of

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35) Cf. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, ‘MN 10: *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* – The Foundations of Mindfulness’ 2005, 145; Tsai 2016, 360, 366.

36) *sampajāna* (present participle of *saṃ-pra-√jñā*): clearly comprehending, clearly knowing. Cf. Anālayo 2013, 39-41.

misplaced categories drawn from mainstream theories of bioethics, especially from those of thanatology. We have here the fallacy of misplaced categories where a concept basically pertaining to “the category of social networking” has been disputably filtered through “the category of the process of life-and-death.” Such a fallacy, first, takes a wrong route to philosophy of life-and-death by way of such an unsuitable concept as dignity, second, promotes habitual clinging to life-and-death by associating dignity with life-and-death, and third, hinders an insight into the reality of life-and-death because the process of life-and-death is buried under simplifying dichotomous views of dignity and indignity.

This paper proposes entrapped suffering as a more suitable category to unlock the reality of life-and-death and therefore to construct philosophy of life-and-death. One of the major advantages of this perspective is that sentient beings are encouraged to delve beneath the surface of life-and-death and gaze beyond the world's suffering.



## Abbreviation

T. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.

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*Madhyamāgama* [The Middle-length Discourses of the Buddha]. T. 1. no. 26. vol. 1, 421a–809a. Gautama Saṅghadeva (tr.).

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## A Buddhist Critique of the So-called “Dignity of Life” and “Death with Dignity” from the Perspective of Temporality

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This study, drawn from Buddhist scriptures known as the *Āgama-sūtras*, critically investigates “dignity of life” and “death with dignity” from the perspective of temporality. The analysis starts by defining and clarifying some key concepts such as dignity, life, and death. This is followed by a critical examination of the appropriateness of connecting dignity either with life or with death. A point that should be emphasized is that although the concept of dignity can play a significant role in the social and cultural categories experienced in a temporal context, it encounters enormous difficulties in the category of the process of life-and-death devoid of temporality. If the phrases “dignity of life” and “death with dignity” are taken for granted, then the fallacy of misplaced categories of terminological application can be committed, and therefore the correlated discourses of bioethics or thanatology may be deceptive or misleading. I argue that the process of life-and-death is, first and foremost, neither about dignity nor about indignity, but about entrapped suffering and the cessation of the entrapped suffering. The critical insight of this study may not only be able to open the mind of the students of philosophy to tackle difficult situations in life-and-death, but also serve as a guideline in the future studies related to philosophy of life-and-death.

**Keywords:** temporality, dignity, life, death, suffering, thanatology

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