

Bioethics on the Beginning of Life: Bioscience and Religious Culture in an Age of Crisis

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1. The End of Human Beings?

RECENTLY there has been much news on the topic of bioethics. One of them which I was most concerned with was about a woman who was afflicted with uterine cancer, got married and could not get pregnant. In-vitro fertilization was performed and the embryo was embedded in the mother of the mother who has lost her uterus, in other words, for the expectant child, the grandmother got pregnant. She successfully bore a child when she was in her fifties. She was the so-called host mother which has become possible now. This story is about a person who has lost her uterus, so I suppose it is understandable. However, if we allow this to happen where are we going to draw the line? If a woman cannot bear a child and has her mother bear it on her behalf, what if another person would say, "I am busy with work now, so I cannot take leave of absence." This implies that she also has the right to do the same. That means that most people in their twenties and thirties are busy, so people in their fifties who have ample time will be bearing children on their behalf. It might actually turn out that way. I was watching a television program this morning which reported that many young women these days could not have children due mainly to financial difficulties or because they were too busy to raise children. However, the third reason was because they were afraid of the pain. It is a fact that pain is involved when having a baby, but today babies can be born without pain accompanying delivery. What is more, today, we can even ask somebody to bear the child for us. But if this becomes a common practice in society, what is going to happen to the mother-child relationship? These are problems of concern.

Similar situations are occurring in other areas of life. For example, if medical technology advances people would ask for a way to extend their life expectancy. Drugs have appeared to prolong life by halting the aging

process in human cells. Today if we live to around the age of ninety we can say we have lived a long life, but there may come a time in the future when we could live to about 130 years old. If we are worried now about the aging society, what is going to become of our society when this becomes possible? This is also a concern.

In the case of in-vitro fertilization, during the step of diagnosis for ovum implantation, when a single ovum must be chosen from several fertilized ovum, one will choose either the male or female ovum. Children are born from the available fertilized ovum. If someone says she or he sincerely desires a male child, they will be able to have a baby boy. Now, there are several countries in the world where for every hundred girls, there are a hundred ten or a hundred twenty boys. In in-vitro fertilization we can choose our preferred child and bear it. We can also bear a child with certain characteristics. For example one can choose to bear a child with genes of high intelligence or a child who will not be afflicted by certain diseases. The so-called “designer babies” may become possible because in in-vitro fertilization the male sperm already comes with certain characteristics and so does the female egg. The price will be determined by the physical attributes. In Japan such things are not permitted, but while surrogate mothers are not recognized by Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, it is not prohibited by the law. Dr. Yahiro Netsu, director of Suwa Maternity Clinic, actually performed an IVF (in-vitro fertilization) operation and commented on it saying that his performing the operation he saved a mother by granting her wish of bearing a child.

I think we have arrived at a very challenging time when we have to decide how far to permit such things in this country or even in humanity at large. Already in Japan there are opposing view points regarding brain death and organ transplants. Therefore, differing views and opinions are definitely due to appear in the Diet proceedings. Currently, there are very few cases of organ transplants in Japan and most people go overseas to perform them. This presents a problem because rich Japanese would have the priority over the locals in the country where they are preformed. If this is the case, people in Japan will be clamoring for its legality. A host of problems like these are now beginning to gush out. And with the issue of choosing the gender for birth, prolonging life expectancy or giving birth without surgery, the fundamental issue of what it means to be a human being will change. This is the reason why people today debate that it is the beginning of what people call “the end of the human being.” Or, rather, is it the end of the human being as we originally know it to be. These issues have been the key topics of discus-

sion since the last decade. Actually, there was an individual who prophesied that such things would occur many decades ago. In 1932, the British novelist Aldous Huxley wrote a novel called *Brave New World*. The title does convey deep cynicism.

In this novel all babies are made in test tubes and not in the uterus. While people do have sexual intercourse women do not have to bear children because they are made outside their bodies. And from the outset there are five different types of classes to which the newborn babies belong to. This is because there are different ranks of fertilized eggs from the well-endowed to the simplest genes. All babies are made in a factory in this way but each rank in a different way. And of course the fate of each child is decided at birth. After being born, the individual does not experience suffering at all. If there is some suffering or anxiety, individuals seek a drug called “soma” which relieves their suffering and makes them feel uplifted. The author describes such kind of society in his story.

In this story Huxley is actually questioning whether a human being in such a society can rightfully be called a human being as we know it. He was worried for the future of humanity with this type of grave danger. It was around this period that the Nazis were killing mentally disturbed people. In Japan, too, mentally disturbed people were not allowed to have children. The movement of the so called eugenics was gaining strength. The rationale behind this movement is that those with poor genes should be removed from society, and the human race should proceed by continuing to develop human beings with desirable genetic makeup. Such kind of thinking should have ended when the Nazis lost the war, but in reality there is an increase in people who think that this possibility is inevitable now. Naturally it is difficult to deny peoples’ desire to bear children with the most desirable characteristics. It is everyone’s dream. What is increasing is the view that such desires are becoming justified. This is called “new eugenics.” Originally, eugenics appeared at the end of the 19th century, several decades before Huxley wrote his story. It was in its developmental stage with keen public interest, but he was actually quite worried about what would happen if this movement actually did take root and therefore, wrote it in a science fiction style. Although it is science fiction story, today it seems surprisingly real and that is why I feel we seriously have to reflect on ourselves.

There is an individual named Leon Kass who was the chairman of a committee President Bush established called The President’s Council on Bioethics. He was originally a life scientist however later moved to the area of philosophy. He is one who shares similar worries with Huxley,

saying that we seriously have to consider the kind of society we are creating today. With President Bush's way of thinking being close to Christian fundamentalism, it is inevitable that he is sometimes regarded as advocating the Christian way of thinking. It is surmised that Bush, influenced by his Christian outlook, fears that the recent advances in scientific discoveries in human life will pose a threat to humanity in many ways. It is the fear of losing our purpose of existence and the sense that the preciousness and dignity of life is weakening. In response, he established a committee to control new research in bioscience. The leader of this committee is Leon Kass, who is considered to be a philosopher with an independent sense of judgment.

Kass thinks that the characters that appear in Huxley's *Brave New World* may appear to be healthy and happy, but they are no longer human beings in the true sense. They do not struggle and do not have ambitions. They do not love and do not feel pain. They do not have to make painful decisions. They do not even have families nor do they do what human beings have traditionally come to do. They do not have any attributes that display human dignity. There is no sign about them that we can say they belong to humankind. While they receive education from a so-called ruler, they themselves are classified into five ranks or castes such as, alpha, beta, gamma, delta, and epsilon. These classes completely discriminate one type of human being from another—as different as the human being and an animal. By deliberately discriminating people through their genes and classifying them in different ways there is the notion that they are no longer human beings equal to each other.

Such kind of radical imagination was portrayed in this book as early as 1932. But I think as members of the human race it is about time we address these issues. Fearing such potential developments, Kass proposed some strict measures for restrictions in advanced bioscience research. This triggered some fierce backlash from American life scientists and kindled part of the cause which resulted in Bush's weak performance in the 2006 mid-term elections. One possible reason for the Democrats' victory was that there was a movement that repelled such severe measures restricting bioscience research, asking the question whether people suffering from various illnesses could be saved by such proposed restrictions. I think it was a kind of campaign on the Democrats' side that won them some success.

Leon Kass is a philosopher of Jewish descent but there is also another noted scholar named Francis Fukuyama, a Japanese-American, who is also tackling the issue of bioethics. He was famous for his book which later became a bestseller entitled *The End of History and the Last Man*

(1992). In this book, Fukuyama observes that due to the defeat of communism, humankind could finally attempt to create an ideal society. However, in his later book, *Our Posthuman Future* (2002), the “post” suggests his apprehension or anxiety of human society’s entering a new phase of existence after the end of humankind. He was also a member of Leon Kass’ bioethics committee. The title of his book—*The End of History and the Last Man* connotes some kind of “end,” when in reality science continues to progress today creating new history. The question is; will we be able to live life the way we have until now? He is suggesting that perhaps human society will face a new kind of crisis.

There is currently another world-renowned German philosopher named Jürgen Habermas, who also talks about a new crisis that human society is facing, but with more urgency. His is a debate on preselecting the characteristics of the baby and he poses the questions of what kind of social system will we live in if human beings suspected of carrying illness genes such as physical disability or diabetes can legally be prevented from being born. What if society officially allows rejection of certain kinds of people from being born? What kind of society will it be? What will be strange about it? The fundamental principles on which human society was based until now and what supported it will be questioned. It may also be faced with whether it can withstand such new developments that heretofore never existed.

This is not only the kind of typical difficult issue a philosopher asks, but something so broad and common that it is made into novels and movies. The case in point is a 2005 Hollywood movie called “The Island.” In this movie there is an underground facility that develops copy human beings for the rich when they fall ill. They can take advantage of human internal organs or ideal physical bodies. When an organ is finally required by these rich people a copy human being is killed in this facility and his organ is delivered to them. When a person is selected for his body or organ in the facility, he is told that he has been finally selected to be of service and advancement of the ideal island. In a happy state he is taken, but actually he is killed and his organ is removed. It is an extremely frightening movie that portrays a kind of factory which manufactures internal organs. There is a class system and for the medical purpose of people in the upper class, the people in the lower class have to sacrifice their lives. This is very similar to Huxley’s world described in his book. And it does strike some similarities to what seems to be happening in society today.

Today there is much discrimination in medical practices. Money is more often becoming the big determinant for receiving a variety of med-

ical services. If one does not pay the national health insurance fees, they cannot receive medical service. In the United States, if one does not have money, they cannot be covered by insurance. I had former students who were a young couple in the United States. They were apprentices in movie making and dancing. When I visited them in New York, I found out that they were not covered by any kind of insurance. When I asked them what would happen to them if they fell ill, they answered, "we'll just sleep it off!" They can not even go to a doctor. Such things are happening in Japan too. In this way medical service is seeing more and more discrimination. But in the United States it is the norm today.

What made this noticeable has to do with the issue of cloning. When a lizard severs its tail it grows back in no time. Though this is only the tail, this fact in small primitive species signifies the possibility that the original body can grow back just with a part of the body. Cloning experiments began by applying this principle to more complex living organisms. Cloning is actually grafting. If you lose a part of your body from one area, the same part will grow back from there. In higher life forms if you remove the nucleus from an ovum and put the nucleus of another person's cell that person's body will start to grow. Mind you, it has to be the ovum, not the fertilized egg. The ovum exists only in females. It is an amazing entity of power and is the source of life itself. Though a baby can not be born with the sperm alone, it has become possible now to give birth only with the ovum and not requiring the sperm. Unisexual reproduction is now possible. It is happening now with sheep. If it is possible with sheep then it could be possible with humans. In 1996, it was performed by a Scottish scientist and in 1997 we learned of the news which had a tremendous impact on the world.

Is it permissible to use such cloning techniques on human beings, is the question. There are many reasons people give for cloning. When a couple can not have children because the sperm of the husband is not active enough, if a piece of a healthy cell of the husband was injected into the wife's ovum, it will result in a baby being born with the father's genes. Identical twins are two human beings with the same genetic makeup in the same generation. However the same process can happen with parent and child. But is it morally right to do that? If this is permitted then the male species will be faced with some challenges. It will become a society in which we would not need males to give birth to children. This sounds like a joke but more importantly, if this practice becomes common, children born in this way will not have two parents in the normal sense. The meaning of parenthood will also change. What kind of problems will this pose? Of course there have been numerous

cases where children do not know who their parents are, but these are special circumstances and are not exactly happy ones. But what if it becomes the norm and we are filled with cases of children not knowing exactly who their mother and father are?

There has already been a case of an unmarried woman who obtained the sperm of another person through auction and gave birth to a child. Such cases will increase more and more. Today most leaders of the nations of the world think that allowing the birth of children through cloning is an extremely dangerous practice and do not permit it. However the cloning technology can be used for other purposes. One of them is to develop internal organs for transplant. Today the only way to deal with a defective liver or heart is through cadaveric transplants. A person has an internal organ transplanted from a deceased person. In Japan, though, it is hardly done. Rather, one receives an organ from a living person. The politician Yohei Kono's son, Taro Kono, gave a part of his liver to his father and his father survived as a result. This is called "transplanting while alive." However the problem is that even in the case between parent and child, because the genetic makeup is different a rejection response occurs. Immunity retardant has to be administered. However taking this makes one susceptible to other illnesses which makes organ transplant an extremely difficult method of medical treatment. The recipient of the organ undergoes pain. At the same time, there is no guarantee of the health for the organ donor himself or herself. There is the concern that the donor may suffer from side effects ten, twenty or thirty years following the transplant.

However if we use the cloning technology, although we are not entirely certain we could use it, there is a possibility we could produce internal organs. Before that, in the first stage of cloning we develop what we call the embryo—the small fertilized egg. It is in a stage far before it develops into a fetus. The ES cell known as the all purpose cell, is extracted by cracking the embryo. If this is then implanted for instance into a pig, it may perhaps be possible to grow a human liver or a human heart inside it. In the United States in 1998, the first human ES cell was extracted. If creating human cloned embryos becomes possible, obtaining such cloned embryos from selected people's cells could enable the extracting of ES cells which contain their genes. The news of this possibility rocked the economic and scientific research fields. This is called regenerative medicine. We can "regenerate" the weak physical areas of our human body. If that is possible then most illnesses can be cured. In particular, organ transplants will become smoother as there will be no rejection response. We would be able to replace our own organs with

transplants containing our own genes.

I earlier referred to the movie “The Island,” where human beings and not animals were used to make organs for transplants, which was nightmarish. Some have the opinion that as long as they are made by animals it would not be a problem. Therefore, regenerative medicine, or reviving damaged organs or cells, has the possibility to be developed in this way too. Today, in IVF it is permitted to obtain ES cells from any excess fertilized egg for reproductive purposes in Japan. However, if we can extract it from the cloning embryo it means we can obtain ES cells containing our own genes. If we can create tissues not containing any rejection response there is the possibility that we can reconstruct parts of our own body in a place outside our body.

Today, nations and private industry are starting to spend massive amount of money to enter into this domain. If medical possibilities using such technology are publicized, people may think that human beings would be able to fulfill their every desire if it became a reality. There have appeared many theorists who say that not only would the sick be provided with ideal medical treatment but we would be able to develop human beings with more happiness and capabilities. For example, there are the American life scientists such as Lee M. Silver who wrote: *Remaking Eden* (1997) and Gregory Stock who wrote: *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future* (2002) who think this way. Going beyond the techniques of cloning embryos or ES cell technology, such as genetic medical treatment or to the level of modifying genes, though we are already seeing the possibility of this being done, we can begin to engage freely in human remodeling. It is already being done with animals. If it can be applied to humans, we can be able to remove genes that are cancerous and replace it with those that are not. We can perhaps take out genes with weak memory and replace it with genes of top performance memory. It might be possible. Silver claims that if humanity starts conducting these practices, human beings will be divided into two classes—those with gene alteration and those whom gene alteration was not possible. Those whose gene alteration was not possible would be called “natural,” and those whose gene alteration was possible would be called “gene rich.” He says that humanity may be divided into these two categories. He doesn’t argue that it is bad or that we should stop this. In fact he argues that we should do it because we cannot stop ourselves from doing it anyway.

The current issues such as cloning embryos or ES cells are controversial because they involve manipulation at the stage of the origin of life. However, they claim that they are attempting to cure diseases. If a per-

son's spinal chord is injured in an accident and he or she has to use a wheelchair for life, this medical technology could save that person from having to do so. Also, a person suffering from Parkinson's disease could be cured faster. Alzheimer's disease could also be cured as well as child diabetes. The hopes are high. However, with these achievements we could also face some major problems.

We say we make cloned embryos but in reality we are making human beings. It's not giving birth to children but it is actually applying the process of the origin of the child to create something. We use the process to make something, and then we break it; actually, kill it. In the earliest stage of creating something, when it is not even the size of a grain of rice, we have created something using the resources of human life itself. This is actually using the human embryo. For example, there is somebody who is suffering from pain due to a terrible car accident or an illness, and we feel compelled to do something for him or her. We get an ovum and a sperm from living human beings, and by using the cloning technique on the ovum we can make a cloned embryo, since there are excess fertilized eggs from IVF that are kept frozen and which are going to be discarded anyway (these are, by the way, sanctioned to be used for various purposes around the world). Then the question remains, if we make new fertilized eggs or new cloned embryos, why can we not use them? This is what is being debated around the world today.

2. The Oversight of Japan's Discussion on Human Embryos

Even in Japan the aforementioned debate continued for a period from 1997 to 2004 in Council for Science and Technology Policy. I was also a part of this debate. In that course of time, the Law Concerning Regulation Relating to Human Cloning Techniques and Other Similar Techniques was established. (Established in 2000 and effective the following year). However this is a problematic law. Under this law making cloned embryos was not permitted. Though the wordings of the law were vague, the only aspect that was clear was that it did not include a "yes." Nonetheless, life scientists in the regenerative medicine field, capitalists who tried to push it, and the government who wanted to be shoulder to shoulder in rank with the other advanced nations in its research, expressed their desire to launch research in this technology. However, whether it was alright to tamper with the "origin of life" without keeping in mind the sacrifices, misuse or the dangers that come associated with it, but processing it simply for winning the current race or for the

sake of saving desperate people is an issue of on-going debate.

The countries that are currently strongly promoting research on this field are Israel, Singapore, Korea, China, and the United Kingdom though we do not know how far ahead China is. However, no one has actually succeeded in making ES cells from human cloned embryos yet. In February, 2004, a researcher from Seoul University, Korea, claimed that he had succeeded. Though it is banned in many countries restrictions for such research are fairly loose in Korea. Surrogate mothers are also quite freely practiced there. That is probably why people go to China, Korea or the United States to perform it. One reason why restrictions are loose in Korea is because Korean women insist on having male children and to respond to their needs the IVF practice thrives.

With the news of Korea's success in producing ES cells of cloned embryo, Japan became extremely anxious. They felt that because Korea had already succeeded, Japan should catch up. It is not simply about who wins the race, but also entails who can register the patent first. Huge amount of economic revenue can be expected with a new technology or breakthrough. And with this, more money can be invested for further scientific research which can lead to further progress. Therefore this can directly and deeply influence the present and future fortunes and national interest of the entire nation. These developments become the grounds for the United States arguing why they could not achieve such technological breakthroughs if Korea could do it.

In reality, though, it was found that this news was a fabrication. In 2005 it was reported in the news that a breakthrough was achieved but it was also a lie. When I spoke to a Korean about it, the person was appalled.

However, there was another issue at hand which did not seem so important at that time. In the first place, to achieve success in this kind of experiment requires a lot of ova. How many ova are necessary at first to finally make an ES cell from a cloned embryo? Dr. Hwang Woo-suk collected more than two thousand ova. Those who have conducted IVF know that using ovulatory drugs to extract ovum is a heavy burden on the woman. There are people who become ill and some who even die. It was reported that there were volunteers but it is highly possible that women who were Dr. Hwang's research staff succumbed to heavy pressure from him. This is a serious problem too. The issue of how suitable or appropriate research and development on cloned embryos is a heated debate in Japan. For example, if it is allowed once, then extracting ovum from females will become a widespread practice. And it is highly likely that money would be involved. In other words the business of selling

ovum for research may arise and its moral implications are likely to arise with it.

This issue is being debated in the United Nations as well. Not only would cloning human beings be impermissible but it would also call for a banning of the use of cloned embryos by the United States, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Mexico, Hungary and Kuwait. In contrast to this, countries that think that this practice should not be banned but should be left up to each country to decide for itself are England, France, Spain, Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium, Japan, and China. In general, the Catholic countries are against it, the Islamic countries, though divided, are even more against it, and Asia, specifically East Asia, is for it.

In Japan there is a body within the government to discuss these issues, called the Council for Science and Technology Policy within the Cabinet Office. The Chairperson of this group is the Prime Minister. Of course it was Mr. Koizumi before, but now it is headed by Mr. Abe. Within this organization several investigation groups are formed and discussions are held. Here, I was also a part of Expert Panel on Bioethics Special Research Commission and as a member I participated in some of the discussions.

In July 2004 a report in favor of it was submitted. Eventually the council agreed affirmatively on research, but the way in which they came to such a decision was rather haphazard. I complained about it but somehow it was railroaded because I learned that there were a handful of committee members who curiously only showed up on the balloting day.

The *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper was the most vociferous in objecting. It questioned whether proper guidelines were in place that ensured the proper handling of the human embryos that will naturally grow up to be human beings as below:

The final report was submitted after three years of discussion and debate by Expert Panel on Bioethics Special Research Commission of the Council for Science and Technology Policy. These are heavyweight issues dealing with people's lives and human rights. Compared to its weight of importance, the contents of the report were fairly casual. The final report approved the objectives of the research and use of human cloned embryos. The use of these embryos may result in the success of regenerative medicine with no rejection. The purpose for its approval was to be able to respond to the expectations and needs of the patient. While on one hand we can understand the research's expectations, we also have some reservations about the dangers and challenges that

human cloned embryonic research using cloning technology will bring forth. That is why it has been banned until now under the guidelines of the Law Concerning Regulation Relating to Human Cloning Techniques and Other Similar Techniques. Despite this, the scientific and theoretical grounds for lifting the ban are not sufficiently and clearly stated in the report. The final report also approved the making of human fertilized embryos (human embryos) for the purpose of supplementary reproduction medical research. However, here too, the grounds for approval are insufficient. (From the Editorial, dated 15th July, 2004).

The issue of whether it was right to make fertilized eggs, or what is the origin of a child for the purpose of research was also brought up. What was banned up to now was approved. I think the way the final decision was reached was also problematical. The concern of upper management of the Expert Panel, the Council for Science and Technology Policy, is the development of science. It is actually a council to further scientific progress. In any case there is a kind of policy statement of broad principles for scientific progress and we are asked to debate within that platform. Under the assumption that we are expected to come up with ways to advance ahead we were asked to debate within the given challenge of becoming a competitive science and technology leader in the world.

Then finally the railroading of the decision occurred. Some knew such practices would occur and some did not. We seriously debated these issues for three years and we represented the minority opinions who gave careful thought to the subjects discussed. We found ourselves in a difficult situation to agree with the final outcome. We offered our minority opinions and expressed the view that there wasn't sufficient argument to approve it, but we were overpowered predominantly by the medical experts.

Mostly scientists and researchers are members of the Council for Science and Technology Policy. Then, some non-medical members of Expert Panel on Bioethics Special Research Commission are selected of which I am one of them but the other members were mostly medical professionals. However, I wonder if it is right to leave discussion in matters that concern human society in general to a team of medical professionals. But they would argue that those who do not have medical knowledge and experience are not capable of debating these issues, and that those who have no knowledge of the life sciences and the origin of human life cannot debate these issues. I did not think so. I think that eventually these issues would have an effect on human society in general, so I think concerned individuals in the area of philosophy, ethics,

religion, or social system should also participate in these types of discussions.

Saisho Hazuki, a nonfiction writer, has covered these debates from its inception and has come up with a brilliant report. Let me introduce something that appeared in the April, 2004 issue of the *Bungei Shunju* magazine. Of late, there is the fact that when the government conducts a public hearing on an issue such as the Fundamental Law of Education, the questions that are raised are intentionally staged and planned in advance. The government would select a group beforehand and call the concerned individuals and have them field questions in the session. Ms. Saisho made an observation of thirty some discussion meetings of the committee to observe who attended, how often and how many times she or he made statements. It was plain to see who passionately led the debates and discussion. Nevertheless, each person cast their vote at a referendum. And even those who hardly attended any meetings continued to be committee members and would only show up when it was time to vote. These facts became plain to see and could not be hidden any longer. True and proper debate was seriously lacking in the halls of government.

I was actually there to witness it all and participated in these debates to criticize the way it was conducted. That is probably why my views sound critical. I have no doubt that some of those experts in the field of medicine found me to be a nuisance. But if these discussions are not thoroughly held then the researchers will be lacking in the confidence that their work is for the good of society. In any case, the way it is being held is indeed questionable.

3. The Reality of the Crisis and Cultural Differences

Firstly, we must face the fact that humanity is confronted by the crisis of the possibility of humanity being reformed. I stressed earlier that there was a growing concern about this. What measures should then be taken? In my approach to tackling this issue, I came across the fact that difference in culture posed a new set of ways to address the issue. When I referred to the United Nation's debate on this issue, I found that Catholic nations were against it and that the Protestants were more in favor of it. In the orient where Confucianism, Buddhism, Shintoism and Taoism are prevalent, full-fledged discussions are not relatively held. As a result, with the Catholics being opposed to it, time-consuming discussions are inevitably held. In the meantime, there are apprehensions that countries such as Israel, where Judaism prevails, Singapore, China,

Korea and Japan will take the lead in the research of this field.

Francis Fukuyama is well versed in the history of western thought and since he has not inherited any Asian culture, though he is Japanese-descended, he says to the following effect that there are many Asian countries that do not have a religion with a system of faith in a transcendental being.

“The dominant ethical system in China, Confucianism, lacks any concept of God; folk religions like Taoism and Shinto are animistic and invest both animals and inanimate objects with spiritual qualities; and Buddhism conflates human and natural creation into a single seamless cosmos. Asian traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto tend not to make as sharp an ethical distinction between mankind and the rest of natural creation as does Christianity. That these traditions perceive a continuity between human and nonhuman nature has allowed them to be, as Frans de Waal points out, more sympathetic to nonhuman animals. But it also implies a somewhat lower degree of regard for the sanctity of human life.” (from *Our Posthuman Future* by Francis Fukuyama)

Christianity teaches that amongst God’s creations, only human beings were created in his likeness and therefore possess a distinctive soul. According to Christians everything including objects and living things were created by God and that God is absolute. Consequently, they are regarded totally different from other living things and are placed on a special and higher level. Unlike this Christian concept, he observes, Buddhism teaches reincarnation, which enables a human being to be born as an animal in the next life. Therefore, in Buddhism there is no absolute distinction between animals and human beings. Moreover, Buddhism teaches that Mountains, Rivers, Grasses, Trees, Countries, all attain Buddhahood. One of the basic principles of Buddhism is that “all sentient beings alike possess the Buddha nature.” That is why the human being is not considered a special entity. “Buddhism conflates human and natural creation into a single seamless cosmos.” While there are different schools of thought in Buddhism, the common belief in Japan is that all phenomena are interrelated and that the Buddha nature permeates through it all. That the life of the Buddha exists throughout the universe is the concept which is strongly believed in Japan. “Asian traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto tend not to make as sharp an ethical distinction between mankind and the rest of natural creation as does Christianity.” The question then arises—why cannot one

do to a human being that can be done to an animal?

As Frans de Waal, the renowned primatologist observes, the oriental tradition sees the human being and other living beings as a sequence. This is very true of Buddhism. Needless to say, only because one has been born as a human being, they can follow the teachings of the Buddha. Herein lies the Buddhist view of the profundity of being born as a human being. However human beings in this lifetime may have been animals in their past existences. On the other hand, we also have the possibility to be born as animals in our next lifetime. When viewed from the Buddhist concept of *jikkai gogu* (mutual possessions of the ten worlds) or *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single moment of life), the human being possesses animalistic aspects as well as elements of objects. In the same context, human beings simultaneously possess a life state of hell as well as the life state of Buddha. The view that human beings are not considerate any more special than other living beings is probably why Buddhists demand profound compassion towards living beings other than humans.

According to Fukuyama, however, such theories belittle the importance and sanctity of human life. The Catholic Church stresses that from the moment of conception human life becomes sacred as it was created in the likeness of God. Therefore, to destroy this life is unthinkable. The Catholic Church, of course, teaches that abortion is equivalent to murder. Compared to this, he says the degree to which respect is given to human life in oriental philosophy is meager. In fact, abortions are permitted and more so when the sex was female in most regions of Asia. Consequently, he concludes that cultures other than those of the west are dangerous.

How can we find a solution to this? Let me discuss Leon Kass' writings here. While Kass does not particularly criticize oriental culture, his argument is whether modern biology has the answers to these issues which he does not think so. He stresses that modern biology does not, or rather cannot, handle the issue of life in the spiritual context as it deems to be. He believes that human life must be viewed from a religious or philosophical perspective which sheds light on the human being's *raison d'être*. His suggestion is that we, i.e. the West, should go back to philosophy of ancient Greece or Biblical traditions. In addition, he emphasizes "What is urgently needed is a richer, more natural biology and anthropology, one that does full justice to the meaning of our peculiarly human union of soul and body." (*Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics* by Leon Kass, 2002) That the human being is peculiarly human union of soul and body already connotes western

thought which he says is explained by the tradition of western philosophy and the Bible. When Leon Kass, a Jew, mentions the Bible, he does so on the assumption that Judaism and Christianity are interrelated.

“Soul and body in which low neediness and divine-seeking aspiration are concretely joined.” In other words, if importance was to be placed on the soul, then the same should be done for the physical body. If serious thought to western philosophies and religious regarding this issue is not being given, they cannot expect to come up with answers to the problem of bioethics, is their argument.

I feel that this is quite true. But to say that only western philosophies and religions have answers to this issue is questionable. “In our search for such an account, we can get help from premodern sources, both philosophical and biblical. We can learn, for example, from Aristotle...” I think it is fine to go along with western thoughts but we can also refer to eastern thoughts and even to thoughts from other parts of the world.

This is the reason for my saying that it is not enough to have experts and specialists in this field to determine the policy of bioethics, but that we should also include the aspect of culture in finding solutions to this issue. How do people live? What are their values? What is important in life? What are things that should not be done? What kind of a life is a meaningful one? If we do not include such questions in our search for the answer, we cannot expect to decide how far and how much medical technology can be used. In a sense, the future of humanity depends on the direction bioethics will go. This is why I insist that values on every aspect of life must be addressed. If this is true, it is only natural that the next stage we embark on will be the realm of religion—and that too, the variety of religions that are practiced by humankind.

Nonetheless, when we see how discussions on this issue are proceeding around the world, the influence of western thoughts is overwhelming. Of course, it is a fact that the west has been more involved in these discussions for a long time. People in the field of religion and even scientists have been having on-going discussions on this issue within the framework of western thought. Amongst the discussions they have been engaged in is abortion—one of the most important issues at hand. In the western nations, whether to legalize abortions or not has been a heated discussion and one which would determine a nation’s policy. Every time there is a national election in process, the issue of abortion would always be closed up—making citizens give a serious thought about it when deciding who to vote for.

I feel that the issue of abortion is closely related to a woman’s way of living. One stance is the “pro-choice” that claims the right to choose to

have abortion or not. Whether a woman gives birth or not is her choice. There is the unwanted pregnancy. In such cases, women tend to think that it is her responsibility. However, in reality it is not as simple as that. In many cases the responsibility lies in the man. In some cases it may have been a mistake on the part of both, the man and the woman. Whichever the case it may be, it is always the woman who undergoes the suffering. This is why there is the group of people—the “pro-choice” camp—who believe that the woman has the right to choose. This is the argument of those who uphold human rights.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that whether it is an issue of human rights or not, no one has the right to take away life. From the moment the sperm and egg merge, a new life is formed and aborting that life is almost equal to murder. Viewed through ultrasound, although the embryo is still tiny, one can see clearly that it has the shape of a human being. Those who are against abortion argue that taking away the life should not be allowed. This is the policy of the “pro-life” camp. Most Republicans are “pro-life” while the Democrats are “pro-choice.” In western Christian nations such as the United States, France, United Kingdom and Germany, the confrontation between the “pro-life” camp and the “pro-choice” camp is increasing in intensity. In sharp contrast to that, we do not see such heated confrontation in the Asian countries. In other words, there are very few Asians who maintain the “pro-life” stance. In Asia, where the thought that human life holds absolute importance over other forms of life is not as common and people are generally not against abortion, per se. Therefore, people like Fukuyama would conclude that if we go along with the Asian way of thinking, it would become a disaster. What I wish to point out here is that we should take into account cultural differences involved in the approach to this issue.

At any rate, what we must give serious thought to is whether the western idea of the sanctity of human life is the only approach to finding answers to this issue. Should we not try to find a solution for all peoples of the world to be convinced of? This is not an easy task. That is why we are continued to be faced with the challenge of how we can control science and technology which continues to develop to meet the desires of the human being. Parallel to this, is the challenge of establishing the criteria for how much to control. An agreement on this cannot be readily reached due to the difference in culture and religions of the world. I truly feel the crux of the problem lies here.

4. The Value of Human Life and Diversity of Culture

How are we to respond to misgivings on Asian thought that arise from western culture and values? People say of Asians that they are overlooking the most important aspect of the respect for human life and that was the reason why abortions were rampant. They would also bring up topics such as the Japanese killing new born babies during the Edo Period. This is not peculiar to Japan but has also occurred in other parts of Asia. Although this is the argument of the West, I would like to point out that there were incidents that suggest such practices also occurred in the pre-modern times of the west. When Francisco Xavier came to Japan to propagate Catholicism, he reported that there were many cases of new born baby killing and abortions in Japan. The Catholics tried to save these children by allowing people to leave their babies in their churches.

If this is the case, why, then, is Japan so permissible about abortion? Of course there are those who are against abortion, but there is not much commotion about this in Japan much less does it develop into a political issue. Even if it does, it does not make much of an impact. How can we then respond to Francis Fukuyama's criticism that in countries that permit abortion, the respect for human life is not upheld. The western concept is that human beings are superior to animals and therefore deserve to have the highest of respects. They have been created in the likeness of God and are the only creatures who can reason. And those who behave irrationally have lost their qualification, to a small extent, to be called a human being. Although they do not say it in so many words, their arguments imply it. To back their arguments for the right to have an abortion, the "pro-choice" camp in the west argues that human life in its early stages where the capacity to reason has not yet been bestowed does not make that life qualified to be called a human being. Such arguments are common in the United States and Europe.

How can we in Japan respond to such arguments? Such are the questions that are hurled to us. Scholars of humanities and social science should be able to respond to such questions. I would also like to see religious organizations tackling this issue, and so should the ordinary citizens. But for some reason, discussions on these issues do not get heated here in Japan.

When dealing with an issue like this, it is not enough to simply theorize or present an array of logical explanations. I just mentioned about the importance of religious organizations tackling this issue, but I wonder if the same conclusion would be reached by followers of the same religion. Even if they practice the same religion, a person whose family

member, for instance, suffered from Parkinson's disease might look forward to further research of medical science to provide a cure to the disease. For another instance, a person who suffered from uterine cancer and could not have children may agree to a mother giving birth on behalf of her daughter. Each person has their own unique experiences and consequently their way of thinking and values differ. That is why it is not necessary that one religion has to provide one answer. It is not a kind of issue where one sits at the desk and reads books after books to reach a conclusion. What I wish to say is that if we do not include real life experiences of suffering, how could we expect to reach a meaningful conclusion.

I am from the baby boomers generation—a generation that is not much liked by the younger generations. I was born in 1948, when many baby boomers were born. When I was in elementary school, there were 14 classes in the sixth grade. One class consisted of 60 children. Today, at the same elementary school, the sixth grade would have just about two small classes. During World War II, the government urged people to have as many babies as possible and they did. Many young people died during the war and following that, there was peace. And then once again, many children were born. People wondered if problems would occur due to the population increase. The Eugenic Protection Law (the current version of the Mother's Body Protection Law) was enacted and abortions became legal. There were "Eugenic Protection Law" designated gynecologists, where women could have abortions without being closely questioned. This is rather early in the world when most advanced nations of the world still prohibited abortions. We must give thought to why these advanced nations prohibited abortions in the first place. Is it only because people strongly felt that life was important at all costs? In the past, people never had to worry about having many children as neighbors and relatives were always there to help. Is that really why woman did not have abortions? I think the answer to this lies some place else. Advanced nations were desperate to increase their population. They wanted more children to be born so the military could be strengthened, production would increase and the nation would be more powerful. That is why they encouraged more children to be born. In the opening of the Old Testament there are wordings to the effect of "Be fruitful and increase in number." I am sure this had to do with the respect for life, but at the same time there is no denying that they wanted a population increase to strengthen the force of Judaism and to increase the Christian population.

Today, we have become extremely conscious of the population

increase. However, is this really a problem of the current times? From ancient days people were concerned about the possibility of survival if too many people lived in the same area and therefore, based on their wisdom as a solution to this problem, abortion was permitted. In contrast to that, in modern times, abortion was strictly prohibited. What happened then to the increased population? People were roped into working in industries; some went abroad and with the increased population consumer power increased. The period in history when the west flourished was the period when they colonized countries. There were British Empire strongholds around the world and the British spread all over. In Ireland too, which is a small country, the number of people who went abroad far outnumbers its current population. In addition, many Irish who suffered under British rule migrated to other countries.

In the same context, Japan too conquered Korea and colonized it. Manchuria, too, was Japan's subject country. When we were young we were taught that since Japan was a small country with no natural resources, the only way it could survive was to strengthen its industries and trading. However during the pre-war days, the Japanese felt that this was not enough and decided to conquer countries that were not yet colonized by the West who had already controlled the resource-rich nations. The Japanese thus went to regions in the Pacific zone and to Asia and also sent migrants to the North or South America.

This is how religion supported the modernization of the nation by promoting population growth. The growth of population would lead to the expansion of the power of religion and at the same time support the interest of the nation. The nation rejoices and so does the religion. Therefore, banning abortion was not necessarily all about adhering to the ideal of upholding the sanctity of life. Behind it was the increasing of power and expansion. I must say this is quite appalling. That religion teaches the preciousness of life is only natural. But keeping in mind the historic facts, it is true that while stressing the importance of life, religions have been supporting war and the nation's interest to expand through colonization.

The population in Asia is huge. When returning from the West particularly, one truly feels claustrophobic because of the number of people in Asia. First of all, our houses are smaller and people live in cramped space. When I was young I always used to wonder how uncomfortable it must be for a family with three children to live in a two-bedroom house. In such situations, having abortions, therefore, was inevitable. Perhaps the same was with those who lived out in the countryside in earlier periods. It would difficult for the parents to leave behind some land for the

second son. Naturally there would be no land left for the third son. On top of that, if the third son could not be adopted into a family whose parents had no sons, then he might not even get married at all. Such was the concern of people with many children. Abortion was one solution to this. The Japanese word *mabiki*, which was used as a metaphor for infanticide, literally means thinning out sprouts of crops to increase its production or branches being cut off or trimmed so the tree would be able to grow tall. This word was used as an analogy to decrease the number of children for the survival of the family. Of course, this is not acceptable today. However, in order to survive, they had to control the increase in family members. It was necessary for survival in those days and therefore was not considered an act of disrespecting human life. In fact it was regarded as valuing life. Today, with the increase in population becoming a serious issue, calling out for a decrease is not about disrespecting human life. Rather, for humanity to survive, the idea of having more children as possible must be reconsidered. Regulating population is not only being implemented today but was also done in the past. If this was the background to having abortions, it cannot simply be regarded as making slight of human life.

I would like to touch upon what Kenji Miyazawa had to say to give us more insight into this issue. Kenji Miyazawa was a noted writer of children's literature and was a member of "Kokuchu Kai," a Nichiren Buddhist organization. The Lotus Sutra and Nichiren's thoughts form the backbone of his works in which he called attention to the tendency of human nature to bully or intimidate the weak and become easily arrogant. Through his literary works he offered suggestions to a way out of such behavior. Miyazawa was a vegetarian and a virgin. It was his way of controlling his desires. His father was a devout believer of the Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism. Jodo Shinshu teaches that human beings are weak and incapable of following precepts. Miyazawa, however, became a vegetarian and respected the life of animals. The reason why I brought up Miyazawa here was because I thought it might support my view on bioethics vis-à-vis that of the West. For instance, in one of Miyazawa's stories, "The Bears of Mt. Nametoko," there is a character Kojuro who is a hunter and makes a living out of hunting bears. The only family he lives with is his aging mother. Although he hunts bears, he is not happy about killing them. Because he empathizes with the bear being killed he feels bad about killing it. Sometimes he feels he can hear what the bear is saying. One day Kojuro says to the bear, "Don't think I killed you out of hatred, Bear. I have to make a living, just as you have to be shot.... It's fate that made you a bear, and it's fate that makes me do this work."

(trans. by John Bester) Even if the bear was told this, of course it would not want to be killed. At any rate, the story portrays the feelings the hunter had for the bear. Sometimes, Kojuro can hear what the bear is saying. This implies that although human beings are different from animals, there are times they can relate to each other. In their interaction, Kojuro can feel light emanating from the bear. And the bear, too, understands Kojuro's feelings and makes a promise with Kojuro. One day, knowing that he was surely going to be shot, the bear appears raising its hands and says, "Won't you wait two more years? For myself, I don't care whether I die or not, but there are still things I must do, so wait just two years. When two years are up, you'll find me dead in front of your house without fail. You can have my fur and my insides too." Exactly two years later, the bear was found dead in front of Kojuro's house. He had kept his promise.

While Kojuro, a human being, had the advantage over animals, in human society he was in an underprivileged position because in Japan those days, killing any form of life was considered sinful and those who made a living out of hunting were discriminated and looked down upon. Kojuro suffered about this.

In the last scene, Kojuro tries to shoot a bear but misses and is attacked and killed by it. Kojuro dies and experiences life after death. He recalls the moment the bear plunged over him. He felt as though his head was hit hard and lost consciousness. He then could hear from a distance the bear saying, "Ah, Kojuro, I didn't mean to kill you." Kojuro realizes he is dead and sees blue light twinkling all over like stars. Kojuro thinks to himself, "Those are the signs that I'm dead ... the fires you see when you die. Forgive me, bears," regretting killing bears all his life.

Three days later, the bear placed Kojuro's body in the mountains, surrounded it and quietly mourned over it. The bear performed the mourning rites just as humans would do. The bear wanted to engrave in his life the fact that both had the sanctity of life. There is no disparity in the sanctity of life between animals and humans. As a human being, Kojuro's life was revered. And the sanctity of his life was no different from that of the bear's. When the bear died, Kojuro realized the sanctity of the bear's life, which was no different from that of human beings. What I am trying to say here is that how can we claim that our lives are superior to those of animals. This is a story about killing bears but we, human beings, abort embryos. The American way of thinking is that embryos are not yet human beings and therefore can not rationalize thus, it is alright to kill them. This is the Westerner's way of thinking.

I think Buddhist or the Japanese way of thinking may be, “yes, it is a sin to kill life but human beings cannot avoid committing sins. We should not kill any form of life but at times we have no choice in order to survive.” This was the relation between Kojuro and the bear. It is true that human beings are different from bears. We recognize differences for what they are but in no way is it superior or inferior or an important and unimportant relationship. The human being is not absolutely superior to the bear. Human beings live by killing bears. We eat their meat to survive. Some may argue saying that this is lowering the value and quality of the life of animals. However, what I wish to say by citing this story is that killing animals never mean that there is nothing to respect in the life of animals.

Buddhism teaches that all forms of life should be respected. However, since we are human beings we tend to respect human life in particular. There would be no problems if human beings could always do the right thing but unfortunately this is not the case. Buddhism sheds light on how we should live despite this dilemma. This is what underlines Miyazawa’s thoughts and may serve as a clue to the issue of bioethics. Making clear distinctions between good and bad and urging humans to do only good is the western way of thinking. Is it alright to kill the embryo or not? Is it yes or no? I feel that the answer “yes” has its rationale and “no” has its rationale as well.

There is another more complicated issue which we cannot provide simple answers to. By cherishing one person’s life, another person’s life may be at risk or a life in the future may be in danger. We need to deal with this issue while keeping this in mind. We may want to adopt a clear-cut attitude but there are feelings of sorrow or guilt that cannot be explained simply from a rational point of view. My intent in bringing up this story was not to offer any clear answers to the issue. I wanted to pose the question as to who or what is supporting human life. I also wanted to point out that the disadvantaged could relate to each other, make promises to each other and even offer themselves to each other. It is like the bodhisattva way as taught in Mahayana Buddhism. If we think about bioethics from that point of view, I wonder what kind of difference it would make. Could we not derive some hints from this story?

Bioethics is a serious issue and we may not be able to easily come up with answers. In fact, the purpose of my lecture today is not about providing answers. Human society is at a standstill now as it is unable to reach conclusions to the serious issue of bioethics. We cannot simply conclude by saying that it is about the difference in culture. Whether it is Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism or even Japanese folkloric religions,

the Japanese have inherited a variety of cultural traditions. There are many works of art that have come from the wisdom and culture of these traditions.

Based on our traditions, I think it is important that the Japanese offer the world suggestions to the issue of bioethics. Moreover, it is an issue that we should not leave up to specialists but rather something that we ordinary people should think about and take part in discussions on it. The purpose of my lecture is to urge all to take more interest in this issue and to engage in discussions about it.