

No. 4: Bioethics

In the fourth and final installment of this series, Tateiwa Shin'ya, professor of sociology and social philosophy at Ritsumeikan University's Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, traces the development of bioethics in Japan and recommends a number of works in the field that deserve to be translated for the benefit of readers in other countries.

The first books to introduce and comment on American and British developments in the field of bioethics began to appear in Japan in the mid-1980s. Since then, dozens of specialist studies by Western scholars have been published in Japanese translation, including the work of George J. Annas, Howard Brody, Hugo T. Engelhardt, Leon R. Kass, Helga Kuhse, James Rachels, Peter Singer, and Robert M. Veach. A Japanese translation of the third edition of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* came out in 2007. Numerous textbooks and reference guides for classroom use have appeared in recent years, in addition to books discussing practical ethical issues in the context of medical treatment.

In a sense, therefore, bioethics as an academic subject was imported into Japan, where it was embraced and practiced as a discipline in its own right. But to concentrate solely on this aspect would be to give a misleading impression of developments over the last several decades. Although there are areas of overlap with Western developments in the field, philosophical and practical approaches to thinking about life existed independently in Japan long before the arrival of bioethics from the West.

In particular, beginning in the 1960s there was growing criticism of the damage caused to human health and life by pollution and medical drugs, along with a growing public awareness of the issues affecting patients in mental hospitals and other facilities. In the early 1970s, in the context of reforms to the Eugenics Protection Law, there was lively academic debate about the status of women and people with disabilities, often focused on such issues as prenatal diagnosis and selective abortion. In the late 1970s there was a movement to legalize euthanasia, promptly matched by a corresponding movement opposing legalization. There was also debate about the acceptability of various kinds of new technology.

The number of texts on these subjects is not particularly large, although they do probably number in the hundreds. The majority, however, were written for a specialist academic audience and have not been published.

There is a need to review the history of the field in Japan, introducing these and other publications, to examine the significance of past trends, to develop our theoretical approach, and to introduce Japanese achievements to a wider audience around the world. A few books already serve this purpose to a certain extent. One recent publication is Katō Masae's *Women's Rights? The Politics of Eugenic Abortion in Modern Japan*, published in 2009 by Amsterdam University Press. The four essays included in *Dark Medicine: Rationalizing Unethical Medical Research*, edited by William R. Lafleur, Gernot Böhme, and Shimazono Susumu and published in 2007 by Indiana University Press, also provide a good introduction to re-

cent trends in the field in Japan. But such books are still few and far between, and addressing this lack of suitable materials is a major issue for the future.

One difficulty will be the deep divide that exists between the approach taken in Japan and the focus typical of mainstream bioethics in the West. Broadly speaking, there are two major differences. One involves value judgments relating to quality of life; the other is the principle of autonomy. Of course the importance of a good quality of life and respect for the thoughts and feelings of the individual deserve to be acknowledged and respected to some extent in every society. Naturally Japan is no exception. But in mainstream Western bioethics, quality of life and autonomy have often been regarded as more important than a person's continued existence, and on occasion have even been seen as at odds with it. Japanese scholars have historically been skeptical of such an approach.

Of course it is only natural that differences should exist between one person and another or between one society and another. But in this case the differences seem to stem from fundamental causes located deep within the societies and individuals involved. Unexamined assumptions stand at the very foundations of our systems of scholarship—and not only in the field of bioethics. Without shared assumptions at a basic level, no debate is possible. I have experienced myself how difficult it can sometimes be to communicate across this divide.

But at the same time, perhaps this also suggests that what we say has real significance. We do not believe that an approach that differs from the mainstream of bioethics is something that is unique to Japan or East Asia. Such differences exist in every part of the world, regardless of whether they have cohered as a formal system of academic study. We believe that our claims are logically consistent and universal. We will continue to build a body of discourse and thought, making it available in a range of different languages. The Global COE Program of Ritsumeikan University, *Ars Vivendi: Forms of Human Life and Survival* <www.arsvi.com>, will continue to strive to become a center for this kind of activity.

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Recommended Works

***Seimeigaku ni nani ga dekiru ka: Nōshi, feminizumu, yūsei shisō* [Life Studies Approaches to Bioethics: A New Perspective on Brain Death, Feminism, and Disability]**

By Morioka Masahiro

Keisō Shobō, 2001. 193 x 134 mm. 506 pp. ¥3,800. ISBN 978-4-326-65261-7 (4-326-65261-6).

This study examines post-1970 feminism—including works by Tanaka Mitsu—and the disability movement to discuss what lies at the root of a denial of eugenics. Morioka is a leading proponent of life studies, and administers the English-language website <www.lifestudies.org>.



***Kazoku keikaku e no michi: Kindai Nihon no seishoku o meguru seiji* [The Road to Family Planning: The Politics of Reproduction in Modern Japan]**

By Ogino Miho

Iwanami Shoten, 2008. 195 x 138 mm. 380 pp. ¥3,400. ISBN 978-4-00-022488-8.

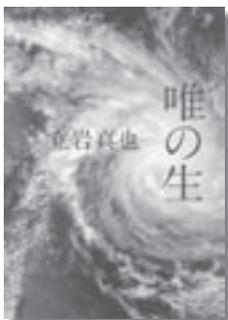
This is more a historical study than a work of bioethics. How did the idea that having children was an individual choice come to be taken for granted? This book examines the concept of reproductive rights while tracing the development of the related discourse from the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the present.

***Inochi no onnatachi e: Torimidashi ūman riburon* [For Women of Life: An Informal Theory of Women's Liberation]**

By Tanaka Mitsu

Pandora, 2004. 194 x 134 mm. 400 pp. ¥3,000. ISBN 978-4-7684-7823-3 (4-7684-7823-9).

This is not an academic work but a personal account by a leading figure in the Japanese women's liberation movement of the early 1970s. Both the philosophical approach and the nature of the writing are quite different from bioethics. In places it can appear illogical, and has been critiqued as such. If much of the apparent logical consistency of bioethics comes from a habit of not questioning our assumptions, however, then perhaps this book represents a more honest approach to thinking in the field.



***Yoi shi* [A Good Death] and *Tada no sei* [Sole Life]**

By Tateiwa Shin'ya

Yoi shi: Chikuma Shobō, 2008. 210 x 148 mm. 376 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-480-86719-3.

Tada no sei: Chikuma Shobō, 2009. 210 x 148 mm. 424 pp. ¥3,200. ISBN 978-4-480-86720-9.

The first of these publications, *Yoi shi*, considers euthanasia as an “autonomous, natural, and altruistic death” and demonstrates that approval of these values does not necessarily lead to an approval of euthanasia itself.

Tada no sei examines developments in the discourse regarding terminal care in Japan. Discussion focuses in particular on how an understanding of limited resources came to be common knowledge. The book also assays the debates between academics and others working in the field, beginning with a critique of the anti-anthropocentric arguments of Peter Singer and Helga Khuse. It also examines arguments made by such Japanese scholars as Katō Shūichi, Komatsu Yoshihiko, Shimizu Tetsurō, and Koizumi Yoshiyuki.

***Shiteki shoyūron* [On Private Property]**

By Tateiwa Shin'ya

Keisō Shobō, 1997. 217 x 156 mm. 530 pp. ¥6,000. ISBN 978-4-326-60117-2 (4-326-60117-5).

This work critiques the concept of property fundamental to the structure of modern society and emphasizes the alternative values and norms that exist within human beings. There are also discussions of such subjects as reproductive technology and eugenics. Work on an English translation is approaching completion, and the author is currently looking for a suitable publisher.



Events and Trends

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