

Why and How Has Hans Jonas Been "Welcomed" in Japan? : A Reply from Japan to LaFleur's Interpretation

著者	Shinagawa Tetsuhiko
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Why and How Has Hans Jonas Been “Welcomed” in Japan? A Reply from Japan to LaFleur’s Interpretation

Tetsuhiko Shinagawa*

Abstract

William R. LaFleur points out that Hans Jonas has been better received in Japan than in America. This, according to LaFleur, was because of the surprising affinity between Jonas’s insights and traditional Japanese ethics. This paper examines his assurance. Jonas’s insights and traditional Japanese ethics are similar in certain ways: for example, in terms of the views on the attention paid to children, the connection between Sein and Sollen, and the protection for future generations. However, the bases of these views differ, and some aspects of Jonasian thought are alien to traditional Japanese ethics: his attitude towards nature, his theology, and his idea that human beings can “transcend” the self. Japanese readers should understand these factors in order to understand Jonas’s thought more adequately. However, this in turn could endorse LaFleur’s idea that Jonas’ insights can be universally understood.

1. Is There “A Surprising Affinity” Between Jonas’s Insights and Traditional Japanese Ethics?

William R. LaFleur is known for his study of bioethics and medieval and contemporary Japanese religion. The former includes research of Hans Jonas, who was a Jewish philosopher born in Germany and one of the fellows of Hastings Center since its foundation. Because Jonas’s philosophy is one of the main themes I have focused in recent years, I was given an opportunity to act as a special questioner in LaFleur’s lecture titled “Peripheralized in America: Hans Jonas as Philosopher and Bioethicist,” which was held at Kyoto University in Japan on February 21, 2009.¹ The pity was that LaFleur died on February 26, 2010. Here I deliver a paper about his study of Jonas to memorialize his early death.

I pick up in this paper LaFleur’s “Infants, Paternalism, and Bioethics:

* Professor, Faculty of Letters, Department of Philosophy and Ethics, Kansai University, 3-3-35 Yamate-cho, Suita-shi, Osaka 5648680 Japan. Email:t990019[a]kansai-u.ac.jp. This research was financially supported by the Kansai University Researcher, 2010.

¹ To see my questions, go to:

<http://www2.ipcku.kansai-u.ac.jp/~tsina/Comment%20on%20LaFleur090221.pdf>

Japan's Grasp of Jonas's Insistence on Intergenerational Responsibility."² In this work LaFleur points out the prominent difference between the Japanese and American reception of Jonas: while in America Jonas is apt to be underestimated because of his theology and its Jewish background as well as especially because of Wolin's epithet of him as one of Heidegger's children, he is well received in Japan as the advocate of intergenerational ethics. LaFleur insists that Japanese understanding is brought about by "a surprising affinity"³ between Jonas's insights and traditional Japanese ethics and argues this hypothesis by comparing Jonas to Watsuji. According to LaFleur, "[T]he remarkably easy reception in Japan of the Jonasian perspective on intergenerational responsibility"⁴ is evidence of its universal validity, particularly since Japanese thinkers do not share Jonas's culture and tradition. Thus he concludes that Jonas's perspective should be more adequately evaluated in America.

I, as a Japanese moral philosopher and Jonas researcher, am specially concerned with two points that LaFleur made. First, how accurate is his interpretation about the Japanese reception of the Jonasian perspective? Also what useful suggestion can the "affinity" that he assumes to be found between Jonas and Japanese ethics provide to understand Jonas's thought? With these concerns in mind, this paper is organized as follows: First, LaFleur's interpretation is reconstructed in Section 2. Then, this interpretation is critically examined from the viewpoint of Jonas's thought in Section 3. This examination would possibly suggest some ideas in Jonas's work that are not easily received in Japan. Recognizing these ideas will help us understand Jonas's work more accurately in Section 4. But my criticism of LaFleur's perspective does not mean that I support the parties he refutes. The reason for it is given in Section 5 and then the conclusion is proposed in Section 6.

LaFleur devoted his life in understanding foreign cultures. His accomplishment leads me, as a Japanese scholar, to reflect my own tradition in writing this paper and to suggest a more accurate understanding of Jonas, who himself belongs to different culture. Therefore this paper is *un hommage* to LaFleur.

² William R. LaFleur, "Infants, Paternalism, and Bioethics: Japan's Grasp of Jonas's Insistence on Intergenerational Responsibility," in *The Legacy of Hans Jonas: Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuels and Christian Wiese, Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2008, pp.461-480.

³ Ibid., p.461.

⁴ Ibid., p.475.

2. Reconstruction of LaFleur's Argument

LaFleur points out that in America Jonas has not been well received as he deserved. There are three hindering factors. First Wolin's book titled *Heidegger's Children* is influential in depicting Jonas as paternalistic and anti-democratic qualities reminiscent of his teacher.⁵ Then, because he had a background from the Jewish tradition, his insights are deemed to have gained their validity only from those who share his culture or theology. Next, Jonas is believed to have belonged to the conservative party along with Kass,⁶ who claimed that Jonas had a major impact on his own thinking.

In stark contrast to this perception, according to LaFleur, Jonas has been more positively received in Japan. "In my own reading in Japanese bioethics over more than a decade I have been surprised at how often I have seen Jonas cited...It appears that for his readers in Japan what best encapsulates the distinctively important principle in the thought of Jonas is referred to as his perspective on *sedaikan no rinri*, an 'intergenerational ethics'."⁷ Why is Jonas so well received in Japan? LaFleur proposes the hypothesis that "this theme [intergenerational ethics] in Jonas has a strong, even if implicit, affinity with a major emphasis in traditional ethical systems in East Asia, specifically in Confucianism and the Buddhism of Japan that often was the institutional carrier of an emphasis upon intergenerational connections and obligations."⁸ By arguing for this thesis, LaFleur showed the prevalent understanding of Jonas in America to be inaccurate and encouraged American readers to give the honor that is due to him. I reconstruct LaFleur's argument as follows:

Premise 1 (recognition of fact 1): Jonas has not been adequately received in America.

Inference 1 (reason for premise 1): The American understanding of Jonas

⁵ "When, for instance, in public seminars on bioethics I have tried to make a case for the importance of Jonas, I have met with resistance from persons who, while themselves eager to articulate a distinctively Jewish perspective on this topic, at the same time reject Jonas as irrelevant. And one stated reason for such a dismissal has been that Jonas remained, even after early teacher's embrace of the Third Reich, a closeted Heideggerian." (Ibid., p.461).

⁶ Leon R. Kass served as the chair of the President's Council on Bioethics during 2002 to 2005. He suspected the progress of technology and liberal democracy in his book *Life, Liberty and the Defence of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002.

⁷ LaFleur, op. cit., p.462.

⁸ Ibid., pp.462-3.

is biased.

Premise 2 (recognition of fact 2): Jonas has been adequately received in Japan.

Inference 2 (reason for premise 2): There is an affinity between Jonas's intergenerational ethics and the traditional ethics in Japan and in East Asia.

Conclusion 1 (based on premise 2 and inference 2): Jonas's significance can be widely received in the world.

Conclusion 2 (based on premise 1, inference 1 and conclusion 1): The American understanding of Jonas is biased and he should be more adequately received in America.

Now let us examine these assumptions in detail. LaFleur's criticism of Wolin is central to the second inference. His criticism consists of two aspects: one is a disapproval of Wolin's interpretation of Jonas's texts and the other is a challenge to Wolin's support of the dominant European and American ethical theories that autonomy is thought to be the paramount principle.

Although the keynote of LaFleur's refutation consists of his suggestion of Wolin's tendency to interpret Jonas's texts as being tailored to the concept of "Heidegger's Children," I focus primarily on two characteristics of Wolin's portrait of Jonas.

First, I look at Wolin's criticism of Jonas as being paternalistic. The model of parent's responsibility to a child, especially to a suckling infant, is taken by Jonas as the archetype of responsibility.⁹ But Wolin insists that Jonas applied this model to other human relationships, hence, concludes Jonasian ethics to be paternalistic. Wolin also criticizes Jonas as anti-democratic, which comes from his interpretation that Jonas requires statesmen to be people's parents. Indeed Jonas has made a literal comparison between parents and statesmen.¹⁰ LaFleur concedes that the comparison is possibly misleading. But there is no evidence in *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* that Jonas applies parent-child relation to human relationship in general. LaFleur suggests that, "Jonas explicitly wanted to find *an exception* to the universalizability of autonomy rule."¹¹

⁹ Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1984, S.240 (The English translation is found in *The Imperative of Responsibility*, the University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp.97-98).

¹⁰ Ibid., S.182-S.183.

¹¹ LaFleur, op. cit., p.468. Emphasis is LaFleur's.

It is because “autonomy as principle has usually been allowed to trump other principles”¹² in Europe and America that the epithet of ‘paternalistic’ would lead to the dismissal of Jonas in these countries. LaFleur challenges the assumption of Jonas’s paternalism by suggesting that, since children are not autonomous, “some kind of provisional ‘paternalism,’ if rightly understood and implemented, would seem called for”¹³ in their case. The existence of children is too important to be neglected. According to LaFleur, “Jonas realized that calling attention to the ‘problem’ of children could serve not only to expose a much larger lacuna in the dominant ethics of the modern West but also to provide a base for his own constructive ethics of intergenerational responsibility.”¹⁴ Jonas thereby shows that the alleged universal principle of autonomy is only based on pretence. He also challenges the exclusion of Sollen from Sein by pointing out the fact that seeing a suckling infant evokes our responsibility to it. Furthermore he assures that our generation is to future generation *in loco parentis* through the impact of our activities on global environment.

Let us discuss premise 2 and inference 2. In Japan Jonas has often been cited and not only in a repetition of his words. LaFleur asserts, “it is possible to find within the Japanese discussions of ethics, even well *before* any knowledge of Jonas was present in Japan, an almost uncannily exact parallel to the structure of linked concerns in Jonas.”¹⁵ The historical Japanese concerns that preceded Jonas involve (1) attention to children as posing a “problem” to the autonomy principle, (2) the connection between Sein and Sollen, and (3) the components of an ethic of intergenerational responsibility. LaFleur finds the parallel concerns to them in Watsuji.

After criticizing Kant’s notion of foundation of duties based on the fact of individuals’ immediate consciousness of them, Watsuji writes, “But the practical interconnection of acts includes the mutual understanding of subjects on a deeper level than is the case with the consciousness of the individual. On the basis of these subjective connections, obligatory consciousness arises. And what is more, it arises on the ground of a definite betweenness; that is, on this basis, the relations of social ethics are established in the form of self-realization as a

¹² Ibid., p.463.

¹³ Ibid., p.464.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.465.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.469.

way of acting within the betweenness.”¹⁶ Before quoting further, LaFleur sums up as follows: “Consistent with views shared within both Buddhism and Confucianism, Watsuji deemed it an error to postulate the existence of discretely independent and individual persons who then go about forming relationships — as if such relationships were a secondary, volitionally constructed something and not intrinsic to the very existence of the human being at birth.”¹⁷ Watsuji’s priority on betweenness calls forth, according to LaFleur, the connection between Sein and Sollen. “And because those relationships *are* there, they have a claim, even if not an absolute claim, to be included within what *ought* to be.”¹⁸ Furthermore LaFleur finds that great attention has been paid to children in Watsuji’s ethics. Although LaFleur only refers to the page without quoting, Watsuji writes there, “We do not ascribe action to infants, because their behaviors cannot yet be said to be conscious, voluntary, and intellectual.... Man can acknowledge in them potentiality to be individual, but not actuality to be so. Therefore while the behaviors or attitudes of the mother or caregiver to them have meaning of action, their behaviors are not yet actions. It builds directly the specialty of relation between us and infants.”¹⁹

Jonas’s intergenerational responsibility is oriented towards the future. LaFleur reads the same attitude in Watsuji’s ethics, especially in his description of “ancestor reverence”: “In our conception of family [in Japan] those who are its members are not limited only to persons alive right now. By an ancient Japanese custom, every household must have a Buddhist altar at which ancestors are revered, and each year on the date of a parent’s death, the family as a whole must observe this event by religious observance. At such times even a living parent must behave as a child before the shrine of deceased parents. Therefore, we can no longer say that the head of a house is an absolute head. Indeed, he may not make arbitrary decisions that affect his family and this is because his decisions are guided by the ancestors and his duty is to be today’s preserver of that family which was received from his own forebears. *His obligation is to hand it on to progeny without having damaged it.*”²⁰ LaFleur makes the

¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp.470-1 (*Watsuji Tetsuro’s Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, translated by Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter, State University of New York Press: Albany, 1966, p.33).

¹⁷ LaFleur, *op. cit.*, p.470.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.471. Emphasis is LaFleur’s.

¹⁹ Watsuji Tetsuro, *Rinrigaku*, in his *Works* Vol.10, p.251, Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, 1962, p.251. Translation is Shinagawa’s.

²⁰ LaFleur, *op. cit.*, p.472. Watsuji, *ibid.*, p.93. Translation and emphasis are LaFleur’s.

following assertion: “Watsuji’s point is that ... the children and youth of each new generation are instructed in the importance of connecting the past with both the present and the future. An ethic, one that is intergenerational and construes responsibility along the dimension of time, is embodied within the rite itself.”²¹

Thus LaFleur claims that Jonas’s linked concerns are also found in Watsuji’s ethics.

Just because Jonas’s intergenerational ethics has been adequately understood in Japan, it is not the case that it depends on a specific religious background. On this point, LaFleur appeals to Vogel’s insistence that “Jonas does not take theology as necessary for overcoming nihilism... rational metaphysics must be able to ground an imperative of responsibility without recourse to faith.”²² Immediately after this quotation, however, he asserts the following: “My point is that Japan’s ethicists and bioethicists confirm this. That is, they assume that an ethics of transgenerational responsibility is primarily based on common truths that can be empirically known — namely, that humans today are constituted in a very large part by what once were the ancestors who lived before them and, on the other side of this, that our future progeny will be what they are largely because they will have inherited what and who we of the present are.”²³ On this basis LaFleur draws the conclusion that everyone can understand the significance of intergenerational ethics, and Jonas should be re-evaluated in America.

3. Critical Examination of “A Surprising Affinity”

LaFleur’s recognition of the fact that Jonas has been better received in Japan than in America is not erroneous. The first Japanese translation of his books, *the Gnostic Religion*, was published in 1986.²⁴ At first, Jonas was introduced as a religious historian. Soon after, he was presented as the advocate of intergenerational ethics by Kato Hisatake:²⁵ Kato’s description of the limitedness of Earth, intergenerational ethics and right to life of the species as

²¹ Ibid., p.473.

²² Lawrence Vogel, “Hans Jonas’s Exodus: From German Existentialism to Post-Holocaust Theology,” in *Hans Jonas, Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, edited by Lawrence Vogel, Northwestern University Press: Evanston, 1996, p.40.

²³ LaFleur, op. cit., p.475.

²⁴ *Gnosis no Shukyo*, translated by Akiyama Satoko and Irie Ryohei, Jinbun-shoin: Kyoto, 1986.

²⁵ Kato Hisatake, *Bioethics to wa Nani ka (What is Bioethics?)*, Miraisha: Tokyo, 1986; *Kankyō-Rinrigaku no Susume (Invitation to Environmental Ethics)*, Maruzen: Tokyo, 1991.

fundamental claims of environmental ethics in his book *Kankyou Rinrigaku no Susume (Invitation to Environmental Ethics)* caused Japanese readers to link Jonas with environmental ethics, especially intergenerational responsibility. Then two of his papers on bioethics were translated in 1998: “Philosophical Reflections on Experimenting with Human Subjects” and “Against the Stream: Comments on the Definition and Redefinition of Death.”²⁶ In 1996 *Philosophie: Rückschau und Vorschau am Ende des Jahrhunderts (Philosophy and the End of the Century: Retrospect and Prospect)* was translated, affording Japanese readers to have access to Jonas’s life.²⁷ Then *Das Prinzip Verantwortung (the Imperative of Responsibility)* was translated into Japanese in 2000.²⁸ *Macht und Ohnmacht der Subjektivität (On the Power or Impotence of Subjectivity)* was translated in the same year.²⁹ Following that, in 2008 and in 2009 respectively, *Das Phänomen Leben (the Phenomenon of Life)*³⁰ and *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz (the Concept of God after Auschwitz)*³¹ were offered in Japanese. A paper and two interviews were also translated.³² Now most of Jonas’s main works can be read in Japanese.

Nevertheless Jonas’s wide recognition has hardly been discussed in Japan. His intergenerational ethics was introduced without reference to his philosophy of organism and his theological thoughts. Kato states, “I constructed my *Invitation to Environmental Ethics* in ways that from *the Imperative of Responsibility* I received the part of intergenerational ethics as extension of the

²⁶ These translated papers were included in *Bioethics no Kiso (Foundation of Bioethics)*, edited by Kato Hisatake and Iida Nobuyuki, Toukai Daigaku Shuppankai: Tokyo, 1998.

²⁷ *Tetsugaku: Seikimatu ni okeru Kaiko to Tenbou*, translated by Ogata Keiji, Touseidou: Tokyo, 1996.

²⁸ *Sekinin to iu Genri*, translated by Kato Hisatake et. al., Touseidou: Tokyo, 2000.

²⁹ *Shukansei no Hukken*, translated by Usami Kimio and Takiguchi Kiyoe, Touseidou: Tokyo, 2000.

³⁰ *Seimei no Tetsugaku*, translated by Hosomi Kazuyuki and Yoshimoto Shinogu, Housei-Daigaku Shuppan: Tokyo, 2008.

³¹ *Auschwitz Igo no Kami*, translated by Shinagawa Tetsuhiko, Housei-Daigaku Shuppan, 2009. This book contains “Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz (The Concept of God after Auschwitz),” “Vergangenheit und Wahrheit (Past and Truth)” and “Materie, Geist, und Schöpfung (Matter, Spirit and Creation).”

³² “Shinka to Jiyuu (Evolution and Freedom),” originally published in *Evolution und Freiheit*, edited by Ph. Koslowski, Ph. Kreuzer and R. Löw, translated by Yamawaki Naoshi and Asahiro Kenjiro, Sangyou-tosho, 1991. “Ashiki Ketsumatu ni mukatte (Closer to the bitter End)” translated by Ichinogawa Yoshitaka, in *Misuzu*, no.377 (originally “Am bösen Ende näher” in *Spiegel*, n.20/1992). “Seishin, Shizen, Souzou (Spirit, Nature, and Creation),” in *Seishin to Shizen*, (originally in *Geist und Natur*, edited by W. Ch. Zimmeri and H. P. Dürr), translated by Ogata Keiji, Bokutakusha, 1993. “Seishin to Shizen (Spirit and Nature),” in *Tetsugaku no Genten*, translated by Nagakura Seiichi and Tada Shigeru (originally in *Philosophie Heute*, edited by U. Boehm), Michitani: Tokyo, 1999. This is a dialogue between Jonas and C. H. von Weizsäcker with W. Ch. Zimmeri as host.

orthodox ethical theories and dismissed his own ontology.”³³ The translation of Wolin’s *Heidegger’s Children* was also published in 2004; in the afterword of which Kida Hajime, one of the representative phenomenologists in Japan, wrote, “I am sorry but I had hardly known about Hans Jonas until I read this book.”³⁴ Until then Kida had only identified Jonas as a student who was asked by Heidegger in 1925 to inquire Arendt’s address, namely, as a character who was involved in the correspondence between this couple. Except his translated retrospection, my essay that serves as an appendix to the translation of *the Concept of God after Auschwitz* is perhaps the first attempt in Japan to reconstruct Jonas’s intellectual life from Gnosis study to his theological thought in his later years. Certainly, it is difficult to integrate some stages of Jonas’s life and philosophy. However people should be reminded that his relation to Heidegger and his Jewish background are factors that prevent his acknowledgement of being as great in America. But they had not called attention in Japan so much.

Now let us discuss if there indeed an “affinity” between Jonas’s intergenerational ethics and traditional Japanese ethics that LaFleur represents.

Indeed Watsuji founded ethics of human relationships or betweenness. But is it parallel to Jonas’s foundation of intergenerational ethics? Here we should pay attention to the concept of relationship in Watsuji’s sense of it as “a *definite betweenness*”³⁵ as shown in LaFleur’s quotation. As examples of betweenness or human relationships, he proposed some examples involving Confucianism: the relation between father and children, lord and subject, husband and wife, and between the elder and the younger, as well as friendship. Suppose that, while X and Y build the relation between father and son, Y and Z can build the relation of friendship. What difference is made in terms of achieving both relations? Watsuji suggests that each betweenness is determined by its own “*definite manner of conducts*.”³⁶ The definiteness prescribes a concrete behavior, allowing it to serve as an ethical norm. Certainly, each relationship in Watsuji’s sense is accompanied by a specific role or behavior that corresponds to it. In contrast the concept of responsibility in Jonas’s sense is founded on an

³³ Kato Hisatake, “Yakusha ni yoru atogaki (Afterword by the translator),” in *Sekinin to iu Genri*, op. cit., p.419.

³⁴ Kida Hajime, “Kaisetsu (Interpretation),” in *Heidegger no Kodomo-tachi*, translated Muraoka Shin-ichi et. al., Shinshokan: Tokyo, 2004, p.382.

³⁵ In LaFleur’s quotation at p.470. Emphasis is Shinagawa’s.

³⁶ Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, his *Works*, vol. 10, p.13. Emphasis is Watsuji’s.

asymmetry of power. “The ‘what [I am responsible] for’ lies outside me, but in the effective range of my power, in need of it or threatened by it. It confronts this power of mine with its right-to-be and, through the moral will [namely a feeling of responsibility evoked in me], enlists it for itself. The matter becomes mine because the power is mine and has a causative relation to just this matter.”³⁷ The ‘what-for’ has a right-to-be, because its existence is threatened (we are not responsible for something goes on being perpetually without our input), in other words, what we are responsible for are mortal or living, namely they are entities with the purpose of continuing to live. Therefore Jonas’s idea of responsibility is endorsed by his ontology: It is good for an entity to realize its purpose,³⁸ and there are purposes not only in the individual organism but also in the body that is part of it, even in material nature in the form of “yearning”³⁹ to produce living creatures. Therefore Jonas can deduce responsibility for the permanence of humankind as well as for species under threat of extinction from the same concept of responsibility. Thus we must assume that even if Jonas and Watsuji pay attention to children, their reason for it is fundamentally different. Indeed they would challenge to the ethical theories that present autonomy as the paramount rule. But what is held up to the ethical theories founded on the reciprocal relation is not only the principle of responsibility but also ethic of care.⁴⁰ Then we might find a parallel in ethic of care or virtue ethics rather than Jonas’s thought.

Is there an “affinity” between the way Jonas and Watsuji view the relation between *Sein* and *Sollen*? Indeed they both argue that when we see infants, we have an instantaneous insight regarding the norms of behavior towards them. According to Jonas, failing to be aware of the norms indicates that we are not seeing infants, but “a conglomeration of cells, which are conglomerations of molecules with their physicochemical transactions.”⁴¹ The norms are constitutive of seeing her or him as an infant. However, the distinction between *Sein* and *Sollen* stems from modern concept of nature that suggests that values and norms are not inherent in nature, but are only posited by subjectivity. It is

³⁷ Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S.175: *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p.92.

³⁸ “We can regard the mere capacity to have any purposes at all as a good-in-itself.” (*The Imperative of Responsibility*, p.80: *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S.154).

³⁹ Jonas, *Philosophische Untersuchungen und metaphysische Vermutungen*, Insel: Frankfurt am Main, 1992, S.220.

⁴⁰ Shinagawa Tetsuhiko, *Seigi to Sakai o sessuru mono: Sekinin to iu Genri to Care no Rinri (What Borders Justice: The Principle of Responsibility and Ethic of Care)*, Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2007.

⁴¹ *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p.131: *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S. 236.

clear that Jonas's ontology addresses this concern and articulates it. According to him, the dogma that man cannot derive *Sollen* from *Sein* suggests, "The latter has never been seriously examined and is true only for a concept of being that has been suitably neutralized beforehand (as "value free") – so that the nonderivability of an 'ought' from it follows tautologically. To expand this trivial conclusion into a general axiom is equivalent to asserting that no other concept of being is possible, or: that the one serving as the premise here (ultimately borrowed from the natural sciences) is the true and complete concept of being. Thus, with the very assumption of such a concept of being, the rigid separation of 'is' and 'ought' reflects in itself already a definite *metaphysics*."⁴² Because it is metaphysics, it is a frame of thinking established prior to experience and therefore can neither be empirically proved nor refuted. But, in response to this categorization, Jonas's opponents would propose that their thought is not a different metaphysics. As opposed to being metaphysical, *Sollen* in Watsuji's sense is founded on a definitive manner of behavior that is already established as custom in a certain society. If this is the case, what differentiates it from a rule such as a table manner? While people may be noisy when eating noodles in Japan, they may not be when eating soup in the West. This rule is normative. At most it entails social validity, but not moral validity à la Habermas. Thus Jonas's opponents focus on his metaphysics, while Watsuji's critics focus on the difference between social and moral validity. Certainly, these philosophers derive different concerns from the relation between *Sein* and *Sollen*.

Because this divergence is neglected by LaFleur, immediately after quoting Vogel he states that Jonas's perspective can be widely received as "common truths that can be empirically known."⁴³ But it is Jonas's rational metaphysics that Vogel focuses on. So long as it is metaphysics, it cannot be supported by empirical truth. Even if everyone, including Jonas himself, admits it to be an empirical truth that each generation is determined by its ancestors, this is not what Jonas intends to prove in his metaphysics.

Last, can we find the same orientation towards future generation between Jonas's intergenerational ethics and Watsuji's ethical theory? Indeed, as shown by LaFleur, the reverence for ancestors in Japan leads to prayer for the continuity and prosperity of progeny. But this prayer is done only for the

⁴² *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p.44: *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S. 92. Emphasis is Jonas's.

⁴³ LaFleur, op. cit., p.475.

offspring of a certain family. On the contrary, Jonas appeals to the survival of humankind and the preservation of the notion of human beings as responsible beings. Jonas and Watsuji differ in this respect.

Thus we can conclude that there is no structural affinity between Jonas's intergenerational ethics and traditional Japanese ethics that LaFleur has claimed to discover, although we can find some judgments in common between them. We can assume that it is because the Japanese are conscious of the connection between generations that Jonas is able to be more easily received in Japan than in America. The latter appears to be novel to American scholars: When Shrader-Frechette insists on the right of the future generation in an appeal to Rawls, she is also referring to the Japanese concept of “*on* (obligation)” between generations, namely the idea that people repay an obligation to the ancestors by caring for their descendants' well-being.⁴⁴ The belief that people are synchronically and diachronically interconnected has perhaps inhibited Japanese society from being as individualistic as American society and therefore paternalism does not evoke as strong an opposition in Japan as it does in America. Though Shrader-Frechette appeals to the idea of “*on*,” it is perhaps more persuasive in Japan to insist on intergenerational ethics based on the concept of responsibility than on Rawlsian theory of social contract. As LaFleur shows, relationships are not found to be established by contract, but rather to be pre-given. However, this stance might be explained better by making a parallel to ethic of care than to Jonas's thought. In fact, a psychological research shows that care orientation is very prominent among Japanese adolescents.⁴⁵

4. Possible ‘Alien’ Factors in Jonas’s Thought to Traditional Japanese Ethics

Now if we cannot find their true affinity, some factors in Jonas's thought might be ‘alien’ to traditional Japanese ethics. These factors should be noted for a more accurate reception of Jonas. I focus on Japanese attitude to nature.

In his book *Fuudo (Milieu)* Watsuji points out two characteristics of the humid climate in monsoon regions including Japan. On one hand, the damp

⁴⁴ Kristin S. Shrader-Frechette, “Technology, the Environment, and Intergenerational Equity,” in *Environmental Ethics*, edited by Kristin S. Shrader-Frechette, the Boxwood Press: Pacific Grove, 1991, p.71.

⁴⁵ Yamagishi Akiko, *Doutokusei no Hattatsu ni kansuru jisshouteki rironteki Kenkyuu (A Positivistic and Theoretical Study of Moral Development)*, Kazama Shobou: Tokyo, 1995, p.89ff.

brings out the grace of nature. As he puts it, “Thus human world is full of vegetative and animal lives. [Contrary to a desert] nature does not mean death, but life.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, the damp is changed into heavy rain, storms, and floods to attack human beings. “Its power is so huge that human beings *give up resistance* and they are only *submissive* to it.”⁴⁷ This image of nature generates the expectation that nature cannot be regulated by human being, but rather that it recovers its order by itself, even when humankind brings about some disorder in it. But human activities involving science and technology have already surpassed this expectation. In fact Japan became an industrial state and has triggered serious destruction of the environment including a range of industrial pollution, suggesting that human power has exhausted the fertility of nature. Therefore Jonas’s idea of responsibility functional to power has the potential to help improve the human attitude towards nature, especially in Japan.

In his theological work Jonas describes that God’s work, namely, the creation of nature, was “entrusted to the chance and risk of the [human] activities.”⁴⁸ However far his concept of God as non-omnipotent is from the Jewish orthodox tradition, it cannot be denied that the idea of God’s creation of the world in Jonas’s view stems from Jewish tradition. Does this possibly prevent the reception of Jonas in Japan? No. As LaFleur correctly points out, no theological presupposition is needed for the principle of responsibility. Jonas himself declares as much. According to him, “. . . the question of whether the world ought to be – which it does if its existence (or existence *per se*) is a value compared with non-existence – can be separated from any thesis concerning its authorship. . . .”⁴⁹ The idea of responsibility functional to power is independent of theology. Therefore, humankind’s responsibility to inhibit the global destruction of the ecosystem can also be maintained in Japan, which does not belong to Judeo-Christian tradition. And fulfilling this responsibility enables carrying out the paramount responsibility for humankind’s permanence.

Now let us reconsider the structure of responsibility. If someone is affected by my mistakes, my responsibility for it must be claimed formally before a judge or ideally before the law which as person I should obey and, if I am guilty,

⁴⁶ Watsuji Tetsuro, *Fuudo*, in his Works, Vol. 8, Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, 1962, p.25. Translation is Shinagawa’s.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jonas, *Philosophische Untersuchungen und Metaphysische Vermutungen*, S. 196-S.197, Translation is Shinagawa’s.

⁴⁹ *The Imperative of Responsibility*, pp.47-48: *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S.98-S.99.

I must apologize to the victim and compensate her or him. In Jonas's archetype of responsibility, it is evident that people should pay attention to the infant and care for her or him, but it is not clear as to who should judge humans. However, in his theological work, he requires human beings to see to it in their ways of life that it does not happen or at least that it does not happen too often, not on their account, that it "repented the Lord" to have made the world.⁵⁰ Accordingly, we may assume that humans have claimed responsibility before God. However, this God is not omnipotent and therefore does not judge. This then entails that it is up to human beings to claim responsibility. But Jonas says "not on their account." Therefore, this responsibility cannot be achieved by obeying the norms determined with a definite betweenness or a definite type of human relation. It can only be fulfilled when each human being cares for God and conceives 'transcendence' within self. Certainly this image of human being stems from 'Image of God' and has been articulated on the basis of Judeo-Christian tradition. But it has been taken up by the modern secular idea of human dignity. Therefore, people do not deny that it has been received in Japan.

So far, I have identified some factors in Jonas's thought that might be 'alien' to traditional Japanese ethics. But in this attempt, I do not intend to hinder Jonas from being accepted in Japan. Rather it is necessary to interpret his thought more adequately without transforming it in favor of traditional Japanese ethics.

5. Criticism of Wolin and Kass

Despite criticism of premise 2 and inference 2, as I show in the last section, I agree with LaFleur's conclusion that Jonas can be adequately understood by those who do not share his culture and tradition. I also generally approve of LaFleur's criticism of Wolin and Kass.

LaFleur points out that "Wolin's essay on Jonas, perhaps overly determined by the theme of a book titled *Heidegger's Children*, makes much of what he sees as the unacknowledged but continuing Heideggerian proclivities in Jonas's thought."⁵¹ Wolin's study of Jonas is somewhat arbitrary in many ways. Here I focus on a point that LaFleur does not refer to: Wolin endeavors to depict Jonas as a defender of totalitarianism, quoting a passage of *The Imperative of Responsibility*: "Perhaps this dangerous game of mass deception (Plato's "noble

⁵⁰ Jonas, *Philosophische Untersuchungen und Metaphysische Vermutungen*, S.207.

⁵¹ LaFleur, op. cit., pp.478-9.

lie”) is all that politics will eventually have to offer.”⁵² Hence, Wolin reminds us of Heidegger’s contribution to Nazism. However Jonas writes in the next paragraph, “It would naturally be better, morally and pragmatically more desirable, if one could entrust the cause of mankind to a spreading ‘true consciousness,’ able to evoke its own public idealism, which would voluntarily, generations in advance for one’s own descendents *and* simultaneously for the indigent contemporaries of other nations, take upon itself the renunciations which a privileged position does not yet dictate. The possibility of this happening, given the unfathomable mystery that is ‘man,’ is not to be discounted.”⁵³ Contrary to Wolin’s picture of him, Jonas is far from being a totalitarian. But it cannot realistically be expected that humans would give up their desires voluntarily. So Jonas only “believe[s]”⁵⁴ the possibility of expectation. I assert that it is because human beings care for God and conceive of ‘transcendence’ within themselves that they can “believe” in the possibility of themselves turning to “public idealism” in spite of their greed, in other words, that they are “unfathomable mystery.”

Although the relation between Jonas and Heidegger remains an unsettled problem, I describe it as follows: Jonas’s study of Gnosis was developed by gaining a clue about it in Heidegger’s existential philosophy. He found that both Gnosticism and the existential philosophy shared “a feeling of an absolute rift between man and that in which he finds himself lodged – the world.”⁵⁵ But Jonas later had to part from his mentor. He could not accept that philosophy could not prevent Heidegger from contributing to Nazism. After all, he concluded that Heidegger’s philosophy was void of the norms governing decision, stating, “That which has no nature has no norm. Only that which belongs to an order of natures – be it an order of creation, or of intelligible forms – can have a nature.”⁵⁶ It follows that no norm binds existence that has no place in the world or nature. That is why after the World War II Jonas turned towards a philosophy of organism: It is an attempt to locate human beings in nature. This might be considered as his return or regress to metaphysics, which Nietzsche

⁵² *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p.149: *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S.267: Richard Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*, Princeton University Press, 2001, p.126.

⁵³ *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p.149: *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, S.267.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Beacon Press: Boston, 3rd edition. 2001, p.327.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.334.

and Heidegger dismissed. That is not the case. Jonas's decision should be understood as his point of severance from Heidegger. But Wolin insists that Jonas devalues the human good.⁵⁷ However, in Jonas's papers⁵⁸ that deal with the difference between humans and other creatures, he explains human freedom in the higher stage. Therefore he does not insist on reductionism, although Wolin tried to describe it.

One must draw a line between Jonas and Kass. While the latter, as shown in LaFleur's quotation from Vogel, brings Jewish traditional ethical norms into bioethics, the former was a philosopher all his life, who was conscious of "the tension between a Jew and a philosopher,"⁵⁹ in specific that it was required for being a philosopher to 'bracket' even his own tradition.

6. Conclusion

It is not incorrect to say that Jonas has been better received in Japan than he has been in America. The reason that enables Jonas to be easily received in Japan is LaFleur's original claim.⁶⁰ It is perhaps the case that because traditional Japanese ethics points out the specificity of each human relation and the norms supported by it, Jonas is not dismissed as paternalistic in Japan. Other than in LaFleur, however, a parallel could not be found between traditional Japanese ethics and the concerns of Jonas, namely, the attention to children, the connection between *Sein* and *Sollen*, and the ingredients of intergenerational ethics, nor could an "affinity" between their structures be found otherwise. Emphasis on "affinity" leads to neglect or transform Jonas's concept of responsibility functional to power, his metaphysics, and his idea of human beings. A more adequate reception of Jonas in Japan requires that people should understand some factors in his work that are 'alien' to traditional Japanese ethics: his attitude towards nature, his theology, and his idea of human beings that conceive 'transcendence' in self. If this paper can contribute to a more adequate understanding of Jonas, it would in turn endorse LaFleur's ultimate

⁵⁷ Wolin, op. cit., p.121.

⁵⁸ Jonas, "Der Adel des Sehens: Eine Untersuchung zur phänomenologie der Sinne" and "Homo pictor: Von der Freiheit des Bildens" in *Das Phänomen Leben*.

⁵⁹ Herlinde Koelbl (hrsg.), *Jüdische Portraits: Photographien und Interviews von Herlinde Koelbl*, S. Fisher: Frankfurt am Main, 1989, S.123.

⁶⁰ LaFleur, op. cit., p.462.

insistence that Jonas's insights can be widely received in the world.