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| Contents | page |
|---|------|
| The Earth is a Living Being: We have to treat her as such! - Hans-Martin Sass | 73 |
| The need to develop a Qur'anic ethical framework for bioethics: An introductory paper - Sibtain Panjwani and Imranali Panjwani | 77 |
| Hospital Ethics Committees (HECs): Patient's Rights Ethics Committees (PRECs) in Israel and Organisational Ethics - Frida Simonstein | 88 |
| How Should Ethics be Taught to Medical, Nursing and Other Healthcare Students? - Michio Miyasaka, Sayuri Sakai, Haruo Yamanouchi | 91 |
| An ethical and social examination of the death penalty as depicted in two current films made in a "pro-death penalty society" - Atsushi Asai and Sakiko Maki | 95 |
| Directed Organ Donation: Can Japan maintain fairness? - Masayuki Yoshida | 99 |

The Earth is a Living Being: We have to treat her as such!

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Abstract

The earth is not just a piece of rock, water and soil; she is a living being. This fact is demonstrated by millennia of her life's history, growing in ages, having tempers, moods and seasons, and allowing all forms of life living on her and interacting with them and their interactions. Recent natural disasters and accidents, caused by humans in their drive to cultivate and to control, have again brought the powers of the earth and the land to our attention. A new dimension in the visions

and virtues of cultivation needs to extend on a global scale the Hippocratic 'do no harm' virtue and principle from the singular doctor-patient interaction towards all forms of life, including the life of the earth.

This paper interprets the Bioethical Imperative, developed by Fritz Jahr in 1927, into land ethics and earth ethics; it also discusses the concept of cultural geography of Ernst Kapp, 1845 in Germany, and the land ethics of Aldo Leopold, 1949 in the USA. Of particular new moral and cultural concern is the risk of radiation to the genetic heritage of all forms of life, to livable biotopes and interactive environments. The Bioethical Imperative includes Land Ethics and the Earth: "Respect mother earth with all her forms of life, whether natural or man-made, basically as goals in themselves and treat them, if possible, as such."

"The guiding rule for our actions may be the Bioethical Demand: Respect every living being on principle as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such!"

- Fritz Jahr (1927)

The Bioethical Imperative

The Bioethical Imperative as a term, an academic discipline and as a virtue and principle was coined by Fritz Jahr, a Protestant pastor and teacher in Halle an der Saale, 1927 in the annual editorial of the leading German language science journal *Kosmos*. Influenced by Buddhist and Hindu thought via Schopenhauer and by Wilhelm Wundt's empirical comparative studies in physiology and psychology of plants, animals and humans, he formulated the Bioethical Imperative "Respect every living being on principle as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such"¹. In presenting a new imperative for moral orientation and action, he deliberately and expressively criticized Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, which had called for the exclusive recognition of fellow humans as ends in themselves: "The

¹ Fritz Jahr (2010) Bio-Ethics. Reviewing the ethical relations of humans towards animals and plants (1927), English translation in: *Jahr: Selected Essays in Bioethics and Ethics*, ed. H. M. Sass, Bochum: Zentrum Med. Ethik 2010, p. 4; cf. H. Sass (2009) Asian and European Roots of Bioethics: Fritz Jahr's 1927 Definition and Vision of Bioethics, in: *Asian Bioethics Review* 2009, 1(3):185-197

moral law is sacred (inviolable). The person is not sacred, but humankind in his person must be recognized as sacred. Everything in the entire creation, if one wants and has power over it, can be used as a means only; only the human person and with it every intelligent being is an end in himself. He is the subject of the moral law, which is sacred, based on the autonomy of his will" (Kant: A156). For Jahr the "sanctity of life" is the foundation of the 1927 Bioethical Imperative, while for Kant the "sanctity of the moral law" is the foundation of the 1788 Categorical Imperative.

The Bioethical Imperative of Jahr changes the primary focus of European philosophy and ethics since the Age of Enlightenment away from an anthropocentric focus towards a cosmocentric vision and strategy. Such a necessary change was influenced in the midst of the 19th century by translations of classical Asian literature into German and English and by new scientific knowledge of similar neuronal, psychological, and physiological reactions in plants, animals and plants. Jahr also was aware of the interdependence of forms of life, habitats, struggle for life, good life, and survival²; he thus called for balancing values, visions, and interests among living beings. All forms of life have to eat and breathe, live together, share the environment, survive and enjoy life and living. Thus the former formal rigorist ethics of Kant becomes situational, content-rich and integrative in vision and action.

The most basic moral intuitions for the Bioethical Imperative are compassion and solidarity, living together in interaction, integration, and harmony. Jahr strongly supports legal protection of animals and rare species of plants and animals; he also voices concern about breaking plants and flowers just for fun and without a civilized and morally justified purpose. In regard to eating animal protein, he observes that in colder climates people eat animal protein, but they should raise and slaughter animals in a respectful way. He explains the interaction of egoism and altruism also for social policy: "For example, what is spent on social welfare and in support and improvement of national competitiveness, comes back with interest income, since the state and the economy have a greatest interest to have trustworthy public servants, good workers, financially well to do consumers, good development of the youth, in general the wellbeing of the entire nation"³

The Earth is a Living Being

Cosmos and earth are not just physical preconditions for life and living environments on this globe. Cosmos and earth are living entities themselves. Sakyo Komatsu, influenced by the great earthquake of 1923 on Honshu Island which resulted in over 140,000 deaths and severe destruction in Yokohama and Tokyo, wrote a thrilling novel "Japan sinks"⁴. Onodera, the major figure in this thriller asks his wife while escaping by ship: Can you see

Japan? No, she answers. It must have sunk. Can you see smoke?, he asks. No, she answers, I cannot see anything. - Since 11 March 2011, we have experienced for real that the earth as a living entity, mostly friendly and supportive, sometimes wild, extremely wild, inhuman, cruel killing is real, not just the material for a thriller story.

The earth is dark at night and light during the day, cold in the winter and warm in the summer. Some areas such as deserts or the poles are hostile and not supportive of most forms of life; other zones are full of life and living environments of mutual support, fight for life, cooperation and consumption. Climate changes are occurring over decades and centuries and millennia. We seem to be in a long-term warming period; there were warmer periods in Europe in the early 19th century, colder times during the Protestant reformation in the 16th century. We had ice ages and ten thousands of years of hot tropical conditions in Europe. Elephants were roaming where there is permafrost in Siberia now; coal deposits in Europe and North America remind us of millions of years of tropical plant life in these areas during earlier life ages of the earth.

The Bioethics Imperative translates scientific knowledge about life and life cycles into behavioral and attitudinal moral and cultural responses, i.e. into respect and compassion and solidarity with other forms of life. This includes, of course, the Kantian position, respecting fellow humans and sentient and (hopefully) responsible beings. But Jahr goes far beyond those limits of inter-human morality. The recognition of nature and earth as a living being calls for moral protection and cultivation primarily. But recognizing the living nature of plants, animals, environments and the globe itself also calls for accepting naturalness where it cannot be changed. Do we want to ride wild tigers? Do we want to build houses on sand? Do we want to hike lightly clothed in icy weather? Do we want to produce alpha, beta and gamma radiation which we might not be able to fully control: radiation of iodine 131 with a half-life period of 8 days, cesium 137 with 30 years and plutonium 239 with 24,390 years? Do we want to venture leisurely into unknown jungle territories or unsafe and unknown social environments? Do we want to grow cultivated crops in unsupportive soil or climate? Do we want to build nuclear reactors on geological fault lines? Do we want to produce pollution, which the globe cannot handle, which will make us sick and the environment suffer? Do we want to build megacities, which in situations of biological or other emergencies we will not be able to be kept alive and livable?

It is in recognition and respect to the living powers of the earth, that we will not be able to change the seasons of the year or a global warming or cooling over decades or centuries or millennia, if this is the fate and life cycle of the living earth. However, we can change the pollution levels of our cars, avoid the construction of genetically modified plants and animals which might do harm to our health and the health and harmony of the environment; we are challenged to do it for the protection and cultivation of livable natural, social, and cultivated environments. As bioethics per se is integrative, we might add another field of bioethics not yet seen by Jahr and

² Jahr (2010) *Egoism and Altruism. Two moral problems, their contradiction and unification in social life* (1929), engl. translation Jahr: *Selected Essays in Bioethics and Ethics*, Bochum: Centrum Med. Ethik 2010: 11-15

³ Jahr: *Egoism and Altruism...*, p. 14.

⁴ Sakyo Komatsu (1976) *Japan Sinks*, New York: Harper & Row 1976

others: geo-ethics or earth-ethics. A geoethical version of a content-rich Bioethical Imperative, i.e. the Geoethical Imperative in the Kantian tradition would read: “Respect mother earth with all her forms of life, whether natural or man-made, basically as goals in themselves and treat them, if possible, as such.”

Such an understanding of geoethics integrated into bioethics in its original and full sense comes close to the definition and application of biocosmology recently presented in *Eubios* by Khroutski⁵. “Restore the original notion of ‘cosmology’... a study of the Universe in its wholeness (including life processes)... a definite rational resolution of the issue about active (driving) forces in the cosmic whole, which foremost cause wholesome evolutionary processes in relation to the conscious subjects, including ontogenesis of each person and ascending cycles-stages of the evolutionary process of social and ecological development... a definition of fundamental (universal) laws in respect to both physical (non-organistic) phenomena and processes and equally, - in relation to life (organistic) phenomena and processes, and, herein, - universally referring to all spheres of life (biological, ecological, anthropological, psychological, personalist, social, culturological, etc).”

Cultural Geography and Land Ethics: respecting, interacting, cultivating

What we today may call Geoethics, in the 19th century was called Cultural Geography by Carl Ritter and his younger contemporary Ernst Kapp, a Hegelian scholar and liberal democrat who had to emigrate to Texas after his involvement in the German revolution 1848. Cultural geography was intended to bridge the gap between classical geography and human interaction with land and environment. Philosophical geoscience (Erdkunde)⁶ was described as a necessary new philosophy of science and a useful analytical tool in science, ethics, and politics: “Geoscience alike history can be dealt with in a philosophical manner. Philosophy from Vico to Hegel has produced some remarkable books in philosophy of history. They have earned a special prize for that, as they themselves have been recognized as historical powers, a praise which could have even been higher if they had given more attention to the *geographical existence of the nations*. This deficit is their weakness... *Geography* is ingrained into *every place* of history, into every action of human will in his special spatial limits towards its potential realization... *Therefore philosophical geoscience is the indispensable condition of all true history science*. History in its highest form is philosophy of history or politics in a broader sense. Philosophy of earth science therefore can be defined as a *preparatory school for politics*. All roots of political formation are in man; they are developed by man; the process of this development is history. Geography, however, as with and under history

⁵ Khroutski KS (2010) Biomedicine as the all-embracing science: biocosmological perspective. *EJAIB* 20: 54.

⁶ Kapp E (1845) Philosophische oder vergleichende allgemeine Erdkunde als wissenschaftliche Darstellung der Erdverhältnisse und des Menschenlebens nach ihrem inneren Zusammenhange. Braunschweig: Westermann, p. Vllf. – Cf. Sass HM (1973) Die philosophische Erdkunde des Hegelianers Ernst Kapp. *Hegelstudien* 8:163-181

developing, is *anthropological*. As such, she is naturally very close to man, because the destination of man is the liberation of his spirit by overcoming nature. We call this process of emancipation history, and via this process the *education* of humankind completes itself as well. The anthropological aspect of philosophical geoscience in this sense, therefore, relates to the task of self-recognition of humankind - via the conscience embodied in history and always renewing itself in it. From a philosophical point of view, geoscience, therefore, is political science as well”.

A century after Kapp’s vision of cultural geography and 20 years after Jahr’s formulation of the bioethics imperative, Aldo Leopold envisioned a new cultural and moral understanding and interacting with nature in its entirety, land, plants, animals, environments, - humankind not as dominant exploiter and conqueror but as a partner, interactive, “an individual as a member of a community of interdependent parts”.⁷

If Fritz Jahr would have known Kapp’s earlier concept and ethics of cultural geosciences and his humanist vision of transfiguration of nature, and Leopold’s imperative of humans not to be conquerors of the earth, rather plain members and citizens of the land, just similar to sands, soils, waters, plants and animals in huge land community, he most likely would have made cultural geoscience or land ethics one of the other fields universal and integrative bioethics. Fritz Jahr, of course, also would have strongly supported and signed the *Eubios Declaration* of March 1, 2002, in particular the new and broad description of bioethics, the role and importance of personal commitment, and the protection and interaction of life as a whole⁸.

First of all: Do No Harm (to the Earth and to the Land)

The *primum nil nocere* principle and virtue in Hippocratic medicine of doing no harm in the first place, i.e. balancing minimal or low risk with good success and supporting or healing outcome, can and must be extended to all forms of life in the global dimension of land ethics, cultural geography and integrative bioethics. The earth in general can and has been hurt by humans; goat herding has changed the Mediterranean vegetation

⁷ Aldo Leopold (1949) *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford : Oxford U Press.

⁸ *Eubios Declaration for International Bioethics*: <http://eubios.info/eeidec.htm1>. - See particularly: “(1) Bioethics is an interdisciplinary field that needs to be nourished by debate among all disciplines and people, not limited to any academic specialty or professionals. (7) Every person has a lifelong responsibility to develop his or her own bioethical maturity and values. We could define bioethical maturity as the ability to balance the benefits and risks of ethical choices, considering the parties involved and the consequences. At the societal level, public policy and law need to be developed, which requires a social mechanism for balancing conflicting ethical principles. (8) International cross-cultural bioethics should be developed, including studies and discussions, which respect individual cultures as long as they do not conflict with fundamental human rights. (13) We recognize the dependence of all life (biota) on intact, functioning ecosystems, and the essential services that ecosystems provide. We urge action to halt environmental damage by humans that reduces biodiversity or degrades ecosystem processes.”

for millennia, shipbuilding by the Romans and particularly the Venetians indiscriminately cutting trees along the Istrian coastline of the Adria not followed by reforestation has washed out most soil over the centuries and resulted in meager vegetation. Earth and land are strong and can take quite some abuse and exploitation. Earth and land can and have recovered from severe natural disasters such as meteoric impacts, severe earthquakes, fires, newly modified microbes and predators changing established and well integrated and interacting environments.

The genetic code of life forms has modified itself accidentally and uncontrolled, subsequently changing the check-and-balance of survival and interaction of various forms of life, as Darwin has described. Genetic codes of "cultured" plants and trees and of "cultured" animals, hybrids and crossbreeds produced indirectly by selective breeding, have also changed plant life and animal life together with entire agricultural landscapes. Microbes and retroviruses have been bred strategically in order eradicate deadly diseases or improve therapy. Hybrid plants, some still controversial, will increase food supply and might or might not be more friendly to the environment. The term *culture* originally comes from the Latin word *cultivare*, i.e. working the ground, weeding out unwanted growth, supporting the good and edible and healthy crops and fruits, selectively breeding for even better use. One of the first moral cases related to the culture of deliberate breeding is reported in the Old Testament⁹. Jacob was herding the herds of his father-in-law Laban for no pay, but he requested to be given all crossbreeds after a year or two; so he led the purebred herds be together at the watering places and a longer times, so they could breed across breeding lines. This 'unprofessional' behavior of Jacob was not part of the oral contract between the two partners and was considered immoral by Laban, of course. The Bible reports that Jacob became rich beyond all means; an indication that genetic manipulation and re-manipulation was existing and producing new ethical issues already around 500 BC.

Jacob did no harm to the animals and their offsprings; he was unfair to the father of his wife. Modern forms of genetic manipulation are more controversial in regard to life and happiness of those new forms. Purebred pigs having one rib more, do produce more and better meat, but are said to be extreme nervous and scared; thoroughbred milking cows cannot give birth anymore and have severe pain if not milked in short intervals; we don't know of hybrid corn having different biochemical processes might have a different plant psychology, would suffer or 'scream' differently. Enormous powers of radiation unintentionally set free could emerge if we had uncontrolled or uncontrollable nuclear warfare. Biological and other disasters will cause major changes in genetic change in all forms of life. Thus, the extreme risk of increased radiation is not only related to unfortunate deaths and cancer of those exposed, but even more so to real changes in the DNA setup of all forms of life. This in turn will change the interaction of individual and species life, of biotopes and balanced or slowly changing

environments. Some new forms of life will survive or even dominate, others will do harm, will suffer themselves and will hurt others. Those uncontrollable events will cause a new high-speed struggle for life, never envisioned by Darwin or anyone else before.

To expose all life, the land and the earth in general to an unimaginable increase in genetic modification runs against the visions and virtues of respecting life, making this earth the home and house of human civilization, of cultivation and of stewardship, - against the bioethical imperative. To play with fire and with radiation in an uncontrolled and uncontrollable way harms all forms of life, not only fellow humans. It is the opposite of cultivation; it is uncontrollable destruction and severe irresponsibility. Do the recent experiences with nuclear energy disasters meet these standards of irresponsibility and a quest for radical change? *The 'do no harm' imperative, virtue and principle is a central component of the Bioethical Imperative, and as such has to protect and to respect all forms of life on the land and on this earth.*

Bioethics of Land and Earth: Respect and Cultivate the Earth as a Living Being

The bioethical imperative calls for respecting all forms of life as ends in themselves, i.e. recognizing and respecting their individuality, including strengths and weaknesses, limits and capabilities. Such a respect does not exclude to use, to manipulate and to cultivate co-lives for human and cultural purposes. But there are limits to manipulation and cultivation which are related to the limits of every form of life to change or be changed, to feel pain, to be degraded or to be extinguished for no reasonable and morally defensible purpose. In regard to most animals, plants and environments, universal bioethics calls for respecting, for stewardship, and for cultivation. But in regard to Mother Earth and to wild animals, it also calls for accepting what we cannot change, accepting uncontrollable capacities and unpredictabilities. In regard to deadly microbes in hospitals and houses, the bioethical imperative calls for killing and eradicating.

The future of the cosmos in general and of the earth in particular is unpredictable and far beyond our powers of manipulation and cultivation. Of course, we have the powers to harm and to kill many fields of this earth, even to make the earth in its entirety uninhabitable for humans and many species. But the respect for the earth as a living being and for all that is living on, and in it, calls for good protection from harm.

There is definitely a prudent aspect of the bioethical imperative to respect powers, which we cannot change. The moral imperative in those situations requires staying clear from danger and risk in a similar way as we would not ride wild tigers or hug polar bears or infect ourselves with deadly viruses. Rather, the prudent and ethical response is to reduce risk and exposure. Respecting the earth as a strong and powerful living being includes to not build nuclear reactors on geographical fault lines or in other risky places, to discontinue technologies with low probability but highest risk features, to cultivate and not to destroy natural and agricultural environment, to limit genetic and other forms of manipulation to lowest

⁹ Genesis 30: 25-36

possible risk including the risk of wrong risk prediction under uncertainty.

The *Bioethical Imperative* in its most universal and integrative form is a good instrument to not only respect and cultivate natural and social environments, microbes, plants and animals, but also the earth in its individuality, its seasons and ages, as a home and support of all forms of life, in its unpredictability and danger. Our interaction with the earth and cosmos includes respectful and careful recognition of powers beyond our influence and to adjust and to act prudently and morally for our own protection and cultivation and for the protection and cultivation of our natural and social environments. Riding wild tigers and playing with nuclear radiation contains extreme risks and dangers and runs counter to the Bioethical Imperative to respect and to support all forms of life and to prepare for dangers and disasters caused by living volcanoes and hurricanes, by earthquakes and the shifting of continental plates, by new or old deadly viruses attacking in pandemic proportions, - for the protection of fellow humans, for protection of the land and for protection of the earth as our house and home. *This earth is the only one we have, so if we do not respect her for what she is, we should do so for our own sake and for the wellbeing of our fellow humans and cultures.*

The need to develop a Qur'anic ethical framework for bioethics: An introductory paper

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Introduction

Rapid progress in areas such as medically assisted procreation, genetic screening, and cloning among many others are raising important issues relating to human intervention in the natural process. Moreover, rapidly developing medical technologies such as life ventilators, dialysis machines, organ transplants as well as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, new drugs and surgeries have saved lives. These same technologies have not only prolonged the dying process but also, at times, given a perception that their use is doing something *to* patients instead of doing something *for* them. Furthermore, these biotechnological advances evoke high expectation for new therapies and drugs. However, they also bring about profound concerns about fundamental norms, values and beliefs. In response to these issues, bioethics as a discipline was born.¹⁰

¹⁰ Bioethics came into existence in a rudimentary way in the 1950's, accelerated in the 1960s and began to assume

One central concern in this field is to search for the 'good' one ought to strive for and the 'evil' one ought to avoid. To begin with, the bioethicist searches answers for fundamental questions such as this related to the essence of human existence. This is in order to define the scope in which biomedicine can take place. This is of course an ethical and philosophical exercise but it has crucial practical implications. The first is whatever boundaries are defined by the bioethicist, the question remains as to 'what should one do under a particular circumstance?' This is a decidedly contextual question concerned with the individual decision of the practitioner, the biomedical problem and the state of the patient. The second is, 'who should one be under the circumstance?' This is the domain of character, i.e., is the practitioner skilled enough? Does he/she possess appropriate moral insight? What ethical and/or religious values does the practitioner hold? Finally, the last implication is 'what kind of communities are we to become through our decisions, practices, and policies?' This concerns the type of a society we wish to conceive and build for the betterment of humanity. Once these types of fundamental enquiries are completed, the bioethicist is in a position to deliberate appropriately.

Recently, however, new questions are being raised. There is recognition within governmental bodies in Western Europe of a concept of governance through partnership between citizens and the state that involves people accepting responsibility for each other. This responsibility is defined as improving social cohesion to protect vulnerable, poor and excluded members of society that are affected by rapid environmental, technological and social change. The overall ethos of such a concept is to encourage civic responsibility amongst all citizens to enhance justice, awareness and stability in a given society. In order to achieve this ethos, all sections of the society will have a part to play in developing the sense of mutual responsibility and interdependence that is necessary for social cohesion. Bioethicists will also have to be cognizant of this fact of working towards a shared social goal that aims for stability, harmony and responsibility.¹¹

The second challenge is in the area of moral pluralism and religious contributions to bioethics. As a discipline, bioethics is characterized by ethical relativism which reduces the scope of transcendental morality, spirituality and universal religious ethics. The notion that bioethical theories do not operate according to an overall truth or overarching theological framework according to divine

worldwide dimension by the 1970s. By the 1990s, it was a strong force in the life sciences and in general policy deliberations. Bioethics has come to refer to the broader terrain of the life sciences encompassing medicine, biology, some aspect of environment and social science. In contrast, medical ethics focuses on the professional ethics of the physician and the doctor/patient relationship. See Boyd, Kenneth et al. *The New Dictionary of Medical Ethics*. London. BMJ Books. October 1997. P 1-33.

¹¹ European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS). *A new strategy for social cohesion - revised strategy for social cohesion*, approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 31 March 2004. http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/RevisedStrategy_en.pdf