Personhood: Fukuyama's Caveats and Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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While largely speculative in nature, dystopian literature often warns of innovations, oddities, and horrors that, if not already in occurrence, are not incapable of actualization. Prominent works including George Orwell's *1982* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* depict power struggles in futuristic societies that readers may otherwise not be able to contemplate. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* accomplishes the same feat, addressing the potential malignancies of genetic engineering. Set in twentieth century Britain, the novel outlines inequities, haves-and-have-nots, freedoms and restrictions between humans and human clones. Similarly, political scientist Francis Fukuyama's work focuses on qualities that designate personhood and the implications of genetic engineering. This article demonstrates Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*'s suitability as a supplement and furtherance to Fukuyama's discourse, warning the public against consequences it would not ordinarily anticipate, nor adequately prepare for. Though other scholarly articles—notably David McWilliam's "To Speak Without Being Heard" and Mark Jerng's "Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human"—have already discussed Ishiguro's novel in connection with Fukuyama's *Our Post Human Future*, they specifically explore relationships between the human and non-human clone through theoretical analysis (McWilliam focuses on Foucault's theory of power discourse) and scrutiny of other fictional works, such as popular film. This piece takes a more targeted approach, primarily focusing on Ishiguro's novel as ballast for Fukuyama's assertions while incorporating new historicism.

Francis Fukuyama adopts a bioconservative stance in his work *Our Post Human Future*. With the advent of agricultural bioengineering, which holds great promise with admittedly hazardous implications, one may rationally conclude that bioengineering in the sphere of human enhancement should be treated with caution. As the Human Genome Project reached completion with unprecedented rapidity, Fukuyama believes that bioengineering technologies, and consequent alterations to the human condition, will also transpire quickly. The resulting sociocultural and governmental spillover effects could very well uproot our present, longstanding notion of what it means to be human. Analyzing his work from a new historicist perspective

incorporating philosophy, politics, historical examples, and even biographical evidence, one can deduce that Fukuyama's piece is humanist in nature, championing the inherent good of man despite his imperfections. However, Fukuyama expresses hesitancy to innovations which, while outwardly improving humankind, may ultimately undermine the inherent qualities of perseverance that have made humans so impressively distinct.

Fukuyama's position on genetic engineering serves as a consistent point of reference in discussions concerning transhumanism, the contemporary philosophy that advocates for widespread availability of all forms of genetic engineering as an avenue towards physical and intellectual refinement, and ultimately a progression of once imperfect humanity. This school of thought wields two prongs—a faction that supports the state-sponsored imposition of genetically enhancing one's offspring as a moral obligation, and a faction that stresses an individual's choice of partaking in or refraining from genetic enhancement (Agar 12). Fukuyama, supporting the views of the latter faction, believes that to offset worrisome consequences of genetic engineering—such as stark gender disparities in countries like India and China—a credible government may regulate the choices of individuals and entities that provide bioengineering services. As the government maintains even a modest presence in the sphere of human enhancement through ideologically neutral coalitions such as the President's Council on Bioethics (Cohen 45), Fukuyama, like bioethicist James Hughes, hopes that while an increasing number of people are able to take advantage of swift genetic innovations, those who choose not to for a variety of personal reasons will be afforded certain minority rights. Thus the minority's status as human beings with inviolable rights remains constant while a growing majority adopts marked transformations that ultimately elevate them to a new kind of personhood (Agar 17).

However, such protections are only plausible should the concerned government share Fukuyama's apprehensions. Given historical atrocities spearheaded by governments worldwide, the Holocaust being a trademark example, one may express concern for Fukuyama's confidence in legislation and governmental authority figures. *Never Let Me Go* etches a scenario that would evoke Fukuyama's distaste: a societal structure approved by the British government and the humans who reap its benefits. The novel, while focusing on a voiceless minority, depends on the highly perceptive narration of Kathy H. Reflecting on her formative years at the Hailsham boarding school, Kathy establishes that since childhood, she and her peers served one purpose: to keep others alive through the harvesting of their organs, or caring for fellow individuals in the

process of donating until their death. Much is either concealed from the children or sugarcoated to quell anxieties and questioning. For instance, the Hailsham children are brought to a series of Cottages as a sort of vacation from life's inevitable course. Dying from repeated donations is casually termed "completion." Ishiguro produces a work that not only doubts an altruism Fukuyama does not seem to totally discard, but also illuminates Fukuyama's most salient warnings regarding genetic engineering.

While Fukuyama acknowledges the medicinal benefits of bioengineering to include proactive treatment and eventual mitigation of Tay-Sachs, diabetes, and other debilitating illnesses, he remains leery of the attraction that lies in parents "designing" their children with certain skillsets, such as athletic and intellectual prowess and physical attributes socially deemed attractive (Fukuyama 674). Though asserting that a cluster of wealthy individuals may afford to provide such advantageous luxuries to their children, yet contribute little to an overall genetic change in society, Fukuyama warns that an overwhelming transformation is possible in future years. To support this claim, he cites the cloning of Dolly the Sheep, a feat deemed impossible even a few years before its actualization. Society may presently view genetic engineering as a luxury harmless in its limited use and availability, but as aforementioned benefits are marketed to the public and innovation increases access while reducing cost, grave implications may surface. Should governing officials in power latch onto transhumanist or post-humanist philosophies, dire and perhaps regressive consequences may ensue. Fellow bioconservative Robert Sparrow supplements Fukuyama's caveats to genetic engineering, warning of an era in which the government coerces citizens into producing "better" babies, equipped with degrees of beauty and finesse deemed ideal by societal or governmental standards (Sparrow 32). As genetic enhancement of the populace and its future offspring grow in prevalence citizens, and ultimately the government, may lose incentive to initiate and perpetuate societal reforms. After all, it would be nonsensical to put forth the resources necessary to mitigate the problems of poverty and crime if we could eliminate the very root of such evils—human imperfection.

The final pages of *Never Let Me Go* suggest that one may attempt to assign a group of characteristics as "human" and argue that in spite of an alternate method of being (the Hailsham children are cloned, rather than conceived through sexual reproduction), a minority population perceived as different can still possess qualities intrinsic to the protected majority. In Hailsham, emphasis is heavily placed on galleries to display the children's art. Not only are the children

expected to contribute to the showcase. Their works are to be produced with effort and pride. This expectation levies great anxiety upon Tommy, who is often chastised for his relatively infantile works. Tommy questions the purpose of the galleries, entertaining the notion that they impart no practical knowledge. Upon further discussion, Tommy and the children accept that the art is a true form of their expression, and a way for Madame to capture their "souls." Madame and headmistress Miss Emily confirm this in Kathy and Tom's adulthood, explaining that they "demonstrated to the world that if students were raised in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow up to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (Ishiguro 238, 239).

While it is clear that Madame and Miss Emily remember Hailsham as a sort of haven to ease the strife of the cloned children, it is acknowledged that their care has limits. Madame, Miss Emily, and the guardians seem to play a nurturing role in the children's lives, acting as extended family members. However, several interactions are highly reminiscent of Fukuyama's and other theorists' wariness toward class divisions between the natural human and the synthetic clone. Multiple times, Kathy H. recalls Madame treating the children coldly. At one point, Madame reacts to the children as Kathy would to a spider. Only years later does Madame vocalize her discomfort, finally making eye contact with Kathy and Tommy towards the end of their visit:

> Then he came forward until she was only a step or two from us. 'Your stories this evening, they touched me too.' She looked now to Tommy, then back to me. 'Poor creatures. I wish I could help you. But now you're by yourselves' (248).

Despite the good intentions of Hailsham's humans, they know, by societal convention, that nothing can redirect the fate of the clones they guide. In one of the novel's most prominent scenes, Kathy dances with a pillow to a song called "Never Let Me Go." She pretends the pillow is a baby, a being she is told she is incapable of producing. Madame stumbles across a dancing Kathy, and quietly cries. While Kathy believes Madame is saddened by her sterility, Madame clarifies:

> I was weeping for an altogether different reason. When I watched you dancing that day, I saw something else. I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes.

> More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. That is what I saw. It wasn't really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I've never forgotten (248).

In *Never Let Me Go*, clones possess no genuine volition. While the children may be aware that society offers choices, their purpose remains the same. One may choose to be a donor or carer, but caring for those who undergo harvesting does not preclude the experiences of donation and completion. It is hoped that through donating the clones will improve the lives of the humans they were printed from, eventually curing devastating illnesses. While the system is recognized by the Hailsham humans as grim and imperfect, they acknowledge societal benefits gleaned from cloning and harvesting. The children, made in test tubes and endowed with sterility, are unnatural and separate from humans concerned with the longevity and health of themselves and their loved ones. To describe it more aptly, Kathy, Tommy, Ruth, and the other Hailsham children are tools in perpetuating a mankind they could never be part of.

One may find reality problematic in that not every member of society will comply with the status quo's expectations that offspring be artificially improved, whether this is accounted for by religious beliefs, economic hardship, or miscellaneous personal preferences. If the governing body so adamantly believes, like a number of transhumanists, that citizens have a moral obligation to enhance their children to reduce burdens on others, it is certainly a possibility that the government may exclude individuals who defy its expectations, whether such exclusion occurs through violent suppression or the revoking of longstanding rights. While innovations in bioengineering pave the way for what seems to be a well-intentioned sort of "liberal eugenics," this movement may very well be regressive as governments take initiative to eliminate the societal malady of imperfection, just as Nazi Germany did in its execution of the mentally and physically handicapped, as well as during the forced sterilization inflicted upon poor African American women in United States abortion clinics (Tuhus-Dubrow 42).

In *Never Let Me Go*, not only is human imperfection a societal ill, but dissent is also frowned upon and often castigated. We see Kathy's hesitancy and avoidance of inquiry when she expresses distaste for a classmate who asks Miss Lucy if she ever smoked a cigarette during a

lecture on the dangers of smoking. Of course, this is blatant questioning of authority by someone from a subjugated class. However, Miss Lucy seems to condone the curiosity, already opposing Hailsham's policy of secrecy. Instead of indulging the children's fantasies of traveling to America and working at McDonald's, Miss Lucy reveals their morbid purpose: to provide their own organs to preserve the humans from which they were printed, several times before their death. While Miss Lucy acts as a whistleblower, she reminds us of the children's absence of choice, void freedoms, and the punitive measures regimes have historically taken to silence opposition.

Towards the end of the novel, Kathy and Tommy confirm that Miss Lucy had been dismissed from Hailsham. Miss Emily treats Miss Lucy's termination with exasperated nonchalance, describing her as a "peripheral figure in our memory of Hailsham" (244). Miss Emily concedes:

> She was a nice enough girl, Lucy Wainwright. But after she'd been with us for a while, she began to have these ideas. She thought you students had to be made more aware. More aware of what lay ahead of you, who you were, what you were for. She believed you should be given as full a picture as possible. That to do anything less would be somehow to cheat you. We considered her view and concluded she was mistaken (244).

Miss Emily proceeds to describe Miss Lucy as "idealistic" and "theoretical," implying that her philosophy clashed with that of the other Hailsham staff in that it prevented the proper sheltering of the children in care. While Miss Emily admits to building a framework of lies, she justifies this through comparing the Hailsham experience to that of other child clones not afforded the same luxuries. The children may have spent most of their time contributing to galleries and completing essays with little practical purpose, but their condition could have been much worse. Through silencing Miss Lucy, Hailsham maintains its legitimacy as a bastion of safety not to be questioned. Should the school have adopted Miss Lucy's model of transparency, it may have put itself at risk of aggressive inquiry, insubordination surmounting Tommy's tantrums, and perhaps also its end in the midst of heightened tensions between enlightened clones and the humans whom they are purposed to serve. In Ishiguro's society where humans reign, information is dangerous, given that the clones concerned possess the same capacity for dialogue, discernment, and dissent.

Fukuyama's essay, though thoroughly addressing opposing viewpoints, still faces scrutiny as Elizabeth Fenton finds bioconservatism overly rigid in its view that what is organic is moral, while artificiality is ethical anathema. Fenton states that liberal eugenics is widely misunderstood, that past human rights abuses in the name of that philosophy resulted primarily in grave misunderstanding. Addressing the views shared by Habermas and Fukuyama, that genetic engineering may negatively transform human relations and consequently transform society in alienating ways, Fenton argues that such feared changes would not be so drastic. Even if parents did predetermine talents and characteristics possessed by their children, this would not further imbalance the parent-child relationship. After all, parents as providers and disciplinarians have consistently possessed authority over their offspring in a way that limits their choices, at least until the legal age of adulthood. Fenton employs this argument as her main reinforcement of the claim that human nature would not likely change with the furthering of genetic engineering (Fenton 36). However, if one analyzes Fukuyama's essay holistically, it can be said that human nature could very well change as this technology becomes more available. Contemporary controversies only reinforce this point. Anabolic steroids are widespread in their use, almost socially acceptable in the eyes of athletes under the excessive pressure of competition. College students routinely seek the assistance of Adderall to optimize their academic performance while juggling the demands and distractions posed by work and technology. Undeniably, society has already taken measures to transcend human imperfections to accomplish feats deemed fanciful and unrealistic not too long ago. This brings about concern, and even serious questioning regarding our efficacy as human beings. When one works rigorously to achieve a goal, such as winning an Olympic race, the accomplishment is admirably impressive and the athlete's work ethic is an attribute onlookers aspire to possess. However, if the athlete were discovered to win the race with the assistance of steroids, the public would express disappointment, even disillusionment. If genetic engineering mitigates and eventually eliminates our inherent imperfections that many have consistently overcome in past years, one may find it questionable to even set goals. Tasks become easier, and the notion of a challenge could eventually become foreign. As there will likely be individuals who refrain from enhancing technologies, what may happen to them at the hands of a perfected majority is worrying, as their distinctness as natural human beings would likely be underappreciated (Cohen 55).

In Ishiguro's novel, Tommy is a sort of pariah at the Hailsham boarding school. While Tommy first struggles with violent tantrums, he eventually grows out of this behavior. But throughout the story, we see him grapple with anxiety and low self-esteem regarding his artwork. His pieces are dismissed by authority figures as sloppy and rudimentary, unworthy of inclusion in the Hailsham gallery. Eventually, Tommy works to refine his drawings in secret, but discloses the work in his multiple sketchbooks to Kathy and Ruth. While Ruth often teases Tommy for his fixation, Kathy remarks on the striking development in Tommy's drawings of animals and his attention to anatomical detail. Though Tommy's efforts primarily aim to impress the gallery's owner, the trajectory of his progress may be likened to steps taken to master a sport or acquire a degree. Within the scope of this paper and the world Ishiguro has created for his characters, we can pinpoint Tommy's status as a clone as an attribute distinguishing him from most others in his society. However, his being a clone does not impede his abilities to feel, question, interact, and pursue complex endeavors, including art. Aside from his being a clone, Tommy fails to manifest attributes that would definitively disqualify him as human. Given that Tommy experiences the same psychological difficulties, developmental challenges, and intellectual capacities as his counterparts, is his being a clone sufficient enough to deny him the rights afforded to humans?

The startling implications described above, concerning a society that dismisses the extensive, determined, and ultimately manual efforts man exerts to transcend his innate flaws and accomplish his goals, can be coupled with an alternative world Lauritzen warns of: a posthuman society in which ethics, at the personal and governmental level, are transformed in accordance with the acceptance of the re-mastered, superior human. Reinforcing Sparrow's concerns, as well as reiterating Fukuyama's bioconservative stance on the issue, Lauritzen remains suspicious of society's moral compass as we know it today. In future, as the ability to enhance one's offspring increases in availability and technological efficacy, it would not be too far-fetched to predict a revolutionary shift in society's definition regarding what constitutes a human being and what constitutes a non-human or sub-human being. Again, we encounter the debate as to whether what is natural is always good, while what is artificial is depraved or unfavorable, albeit in the reverse. Lauritzen juxtaposes his argument alongside the debate on stem cell research that was raging around the time his and Fukuyama's writings were published. Though a national council deliberating bioethical issues was certainly established with the hope that its members espouse neutrality in their decision-making, much contention remained as to the

status afforded to the embryos subjected to stem cell research. Lauritzen only foresees ongoing repetition of this sort of debate, especially as innovations in bioengineering only progress in mechanics, affordability, and the results promised (with benefits and disadvantages of such innovations fervently discussed and weighed against each other). Applying new definitions will not simply be limited to embryos, entities that lack a conscience and the ability to actively participate in society. When innovations progress, only to boast advantages to those already born and desiring to remedy self-perceived or socially determined deficits (as witnessed in the leg-lengthening procedure depicted in the movie *GATTACA*, which was in fact introduced as a procedure that people underwent towards the end of the twentieth century), it is certainly rational to conclude that classifications will be deliberated upon, re-drafted, debated, and re-drafted again concerning those already living—enacting a divide between those who choose genetically altering procedures and others who may refrain for personal, religious, philosophical, or other miscellaneous, but valid justifications. While society in its current state may fret and squabble over the socioeconomic divide of haves and have-nots, Lauritzen fears of a world in which genetic inequities predominate. Conceivably, those equipped with revamped genetic prowess may feel resentful towards genetic ordinaries, as their limitations may burden others in areas such as the workplace or medical care. Like ethnic minority women sterilized in abortion clinics decades ago, "humans" with their characteristics adhering to the norms of years before would be oppressed by superior post-humans. With increased abuses sprouts an unwieldy reduction in the compassion that once bolstered the pursuit of human rights, the notion of which may diminish at a rate we humans of today simply cannot predict (Lauritzen 33).

As a new historicist approach dictates, one must analyze the concerned works holistically, provided that concrete evidence and logical analyses are feasible tasks. In this paragraph, we will refer to Fukuyama's background as a descendent of Japanese immigrants to the United States. Fukuyama's parents, both prominent academics in the fields of sociology, theology, and economics, were born to Japanese families who underwent a great deal of mistreatment at the hands of the United States government. A salient example would be the experience of Fukuyama's paternal grandfather, who not only arrived in the United States to escape the turmoil of the Russo-Japanese War, but was later confined in an internment camp during World War II (Moss). Though Fukuyama's upbringing was not dappled with expectations to learn Japanese, nor preserve the Japanese way of life, it is undeniable that his academic

pursuits, as well as the professional accomplishments of his parents, exude an ability to persevere to achieve challenging endeavors, even when historically subjected to discriminatory treatment. Kazuo-Ishiguro, though Japanese-born, shared an upbringing as the child of immigrants, but to England. Simply by observing the family histories of Fukuyama and Ishiguro, we may reasonably conclude that an immigrant and minority background has supplemented the numerous points they make in support of preserving the essence of humanity as we know it—imperfect, but endowed with the capacity, desire, and will to surpass innate imperfections.

Though mentioning the ethnic and immigrant background of Fukuyama and Ishiguro is helpful for the analyses of their work, this will not be sufficient without incorporating a discussion of the Confucianism that has long permeated Japan's cultural philosophy. Nuyen ties Confucianism to Fukuyama's rather optimistic expectations of a moral-minded government that could effectively regulate and offset poor decisions made by those in pursuit of genetic engineering, either as consumers or scientists. Nuyen's analysis establishes Confucianism as an absolute, a philosophy postulating that humans are inherently good and not so easily persuaded to make questionable choices or participate in unscrupulous activities, even in the phase of innovations with extraordinary potential for change. The humans of today, unchanging in comparison to humans of the past, are born with a free will, and in employing free will, are capable of collectively and ethically enhancing themselves in a way that is only beneficial for mankind, the positive consequences extending to spheres of politics, economics, society, religion, and culture. Ultimately, the Confucianism Nuyen describes is compatible with increasing human acceptance of bioengineering technologies, as such innovations could only contribute to a revitalization of the human condition and potential to continue to pursue beneficial advancements, free will incorporated (Nuyen 92). Though Fukuyama expresses hesitation towards the discussed advancements, his faith in government regulation can be accounted for by considering the qualities and expectations Confucianism bestows upon human beings.

Moreover, Fukuyama's essay "Genetic Engineering" and *Our Post Human Future* can generate plenty of discussions, touching upon multiple issues of history, politics, philosophy, and ultimately, morality. Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is not only memorable as an alarming parable, but also as a literary facilitator to such discussions, complementing the points of Fukuyama and other theorists. The broadly encompassing nature of the works considered, it is appropriate to

analyze them through the multi-faceted lens that is new historicism. Overarching in its holistically incorporating approach, new historicism provides readers of Fukuyama and Ishiguro with a more extensive, empirically based perspective on their sentiments and proposed arguments. With the evidence provided, Fukuyama's essay can be said to be one of trepidation, perhaps possessing a nostalgic longing to keep things as they are, as so much good has come forth from a humanity that—for thousands of years—has remained unchanged. Whether that inherent, imperfect goodness only revitalizes itself through genetic enhancement coupled with the protection of minority groups, or dismally vanishes with the emergence of the post-human, remains a pressing question harboring daunting and perhaps unpredictable consequences.

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