

Paradox between Religion and Biotechnology in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract

*In the modern world, biotechnology plays a vital role to help improve human lives and the health of the planet; and, similarly, we cannot deny the significance of religion that helps to shape the human's mind and spiritual growth. Both are equally important even though many secularists and nonbelievers tend to regard religion and science (technology) as vitally incompatible. This incompatibility is also imagined to extend the relationship between religion and biotechnology. We cannot envisage the present world without technology, which is often rooted, sometimes unknowingly in religious myths and ancient dreams and it is unfortunate sometimes technology has proven itself capable of causing terrible problems in the name of humanity and one of the reasons for this may be the religious impulses people are ignoring. This research article tries to analyze the paradox between religion and biotechnology based on humanity raised by Kazuo Ishiguro in the novel *Never Let Me Go*. It tries to examine the scientific credibility and the religious values for humanity in the futuristic world.*

Keywords: biotechnology, religion, humanity, paradox, futuristic world

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the most celebrated contemporary fiction authors in the English –speaking world. He has received noble prize in literature. His *novel Never Let Me Go* is the most acclaimed brilliantly written novel and it is adapted in movie. *The Sunday Times* (2011) endorsement described *Never Let Me Go* as: “Masterly ... A novel with piercing questions about humanity and humaneness.” Similarly, *Vogue* (2009) opined that it is a “Brilliant . . . What at first seems like an account of childhood in an idyllic country boarding house turns out to be sinister and profoundly troubling, a book that questions at the deepest level what it is to be human.” This novel has raised a serious question on science and its creations. The purpose and consequences of this novel are complex humanity and biotechnology that goes side by side along with religious conviction to get salvation. It has raised a serious question against humanity and credibility of science including values of religion in the futuristic world whether it could be a need or choice. As we live in the world of technology and science, science has experimented and invented new theories, ideas and concepts to improve the situation of the world and living creatures.

Biotechnology, a part of science, has helped a lot to feed the starved world population, bringing revolution in food and crops. It has produced and enhanced genetic modified crops with more nutrition that solved the vitamin deficiencies. It has saved millions of children's lives, reducing rates of infectious disease,

transplanting organs in different human bodies, transfusing blood, minimizing health risks and side effects, combating serious illnesses. Biotechnology encompasses a wide range of procedures for modifying living organisms according to human purposes. As *Britannica Encyclopedia* defines, “Biotechnology is the use of biology to solve problems and make useful products. The most prominent approach used is genetic engineering, which enables scientists to tailor an organism’s DNA at will.” *Merriam Webster* defines that “Biotechnology is a manipulation (as through genetic engineering) of living organisms or their components to produce useful usually commercial products. Sometimes it will raise ethical issues surrounding the power to create life and speculate on the marginalization and mistreatment of such creation by society.” It helps to improve human health and life, however the over ambitious creation may invite disaster as in Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. Science can do the discoveries however; religion can help spiritually to be a human.

Religion provides a purpose to live and connects human beings with the real world. It offers security and peace in mind by correlating with the outside world of technology. Religion can be understood as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. *Genesis* Book 1 supports the saying by explaining how: God is the only creator. God existed before he created the world. The world was well planned and is sustained by God. No one can make mistake to take the place of god. Similarly, *Corinthians* 3:17 speaks now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. If there is no freedom, there is the absence of the god. As in the novel *Never Let Me Go*, students are not allowed to use their right to freedom. And *Psalm* 146:9 speaks- The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. Everything is cut and dried from the beginning, even the discoveries of science must obey the rule of creator of the universe.

The novel, *Never Let Me Go* is a story of love and friendship, dark and bright forces of human nature, a reflection of human race and survival and paradoxical relationship between religion and biotechnology. It is divided into three parts comprising twenty-three chapters. The setting of the story is late 1990s of dystopian England where the lives of ordinary citizens are prolonged through a state-sanctioned program of human cloning by the biotechnology or genetic engineering. It reflects the dark side of the scientific world where its process clashes with human emotions, natural theology costing the lives of citizens. Clones are referred as students in the novel. They grow up at special institution named Hailsham School and separated from outside world. They are created to donate their vital organs. All donors/students who have not yet begun the donation process receive care from chosen carers. The clones continue to donate organs until

they complete. The word “complete” means euphemism for “death”. They complete the process after donating three or four organs.

The story begins from the narrator Kathy H. merely introduces herself as a thirty-one-year-old carer who is one of the clones. Kathy, has been a carer for nearly twelve years, in a few months, her turn will come as a donor. Her narration is aligned with three stages in her life: as a carer, donor, and complete. In Part One, Kathy remembers her childhood at Hailsham and describes her friendship with Ruth, whose temperamental behavior contrasts with her own quiet behavior. And Ruth’s pretending to have special knowledge and privileges often annoys Kathy. Kathy remembers Tommy’s violent temper tantrums who is initially an outcast among his peers because he lacks artistic ability. Kathy sympathizes with Tommy, and tries to calm him down during one of his tantrums. Tommy later learns to control his temper after a guardian named Miss Lucy assures him that it is not necessary for him to be creative. After Miss Lucy speaks with Tommy about his artwork, he and Kathy theorize that creativity may be connected to donations.

Kathy often sees Madame, a woman visiting Hailsham. She and Tommy speculate that Madame is the person who comes to collect the best student artwork. Even they think she is taking their arts to keep in her personal gallery. Once Kathy encounters Madame in the girls’ dormitory. Kathy then goes to room and dances to the song “Never Let Me Go” sung by Judy Bridgewater from an album *After Dark*. It is her one of the most precious possessions. When song ends, Kathy sees Madame crying in the doorway. Shortly afterwards, Kathy loses her tape. She searches it; however, she does not find it. She becomes sad. Kathy finds Tommy’s temper returns again in summer. Kathy thinks he is upset about his recent breakup of six months relationship with Ruth. However, Tommy is upset about Miss Lucy, who recently told him that she was wrong to dismiss the importance of creativity. Then Miss Lucy departs Hailsham abruptly.

In Part Two, Kathy moves with Ruth and Tommy to a temporary housing facility known as the Cottages. There are other students named as “veterans”, they are not from Hailsham. Ruth tries to ignore Tommy and Kathy in order to blend in with the veterans. Kathy notices that the veterans regard the Hailsham students with awe, especially the two veterans, Chrissie and Rodney. They are interested in students from Hailsham. Somehow Chrissie and Rodney convince Ruth to go with them to Norfolk, where Rodney claims to have seen Ruth’s “possible” in an open-plan office (a “possible” is a human that resembles a specific clone and from whom that clone's DNA may have been copied). Kathy is not sure of Rodney’s story. In the end, they all Kathy, Tommy, Ruth, Rodney, and Chrissie all drive to Norfolk. The students eventually find the open-plan office. Rodney points to a woman in the window, and they all agree that she could be Ruth’s legitimate possible. They follow her to an art gallery, later they realize that the woman does not actually

resemble Ruth. It was a kind of disappointment for Ruth then she says that the students are modeled only on “trash.” Ruth is angry she goes off with Chrissie and Rodney. Tommy and Kathy go to secondhand store where they find a copy of Kathy’s lost tape. During their conversation, Tommy tells Kathy that he has started drawing pictures of imaginary animals. He further tells Kathy that Madame uses the students’ artwork to determine if couples applying for deferrals are truly in love.

After Norfolk, Ruth suddenly stops talking about her future dream. Meanwhile, Kathy finds her relationship with Ruth is not going to improve. Ruth reveals Kathy that she knows Kathy likes Tommy and tells her Tommy will never return Kathy’s feelings. Shortly after that, Kathy submits her application for carer training and departs from the place.

Part Three focuses on Kathy’s time as carer in Hailsham. The work is very difficult and lonely. She meets there a friend named Laura, who is also a carer. Both talk about Ruth’s first donation that was hard and bad. Kathy found herself as Ruth’s carer, but their relationship does not improve. One day, Ruth expresses her desire to visit a beached fishing boat near Tommy’s recovery center. Kathy takes Ruth there and both pick up Tommy on the way to the boat, which they find bleached and crumbling in a marsh. They talk about Chrissie, who completed on her second donation. On the return trip, Ruth apologizes for keeping Tommy and Kathy apart. She encourages them to pursue a deferral, revealing that she has discovered Madame’s home address.

Ruth completes after her second donation. Then Kathy becomes Tommy’s carer who gives his third donation. They spend their days reading and talking. Ultimately, they begin to have sex. They go to visit Madame in a hope to pursue a deferral at the address Ruth provided. Madame invites them and listens to their request, after sometimes-later Miss Emily appears from the next room and announces that deferrals do not exist. She explains that Hailsham was part of a progressive movement committed to raising clones more humanely. She shares to them Madame used to exhibit the students’ artwork to show the outside world that clones had souls. The movement started and had many supporters, changing public opinion eventually forced Hailsham to close. On the drive back to his recovery center, Tommy asks Kathy to pull over. He walks into the woods and begins screaming. Kathy goes to Tommy and holds him. Soon after, Tommy gives his fourth donation and completes. Kathy drives to a field in Norfolk, where she allows herself to imagine Tommy on the horizon. Then she drives away. Nevertheless, Kathy never explains the donation program, or mentions that Hailsham students are clones. Although the students learn vaguely about the donation program, their guardians never speak about their future.

Paradox between Religion and Biotechnology

Science and religion have more often been complementary to each other and both are important facets of modern life. There should be a balance between two. However, this is not as simple as we thought. A paradox usually involves contradictory-yet-interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. The paradox in Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* draws on contemporary debates about the ethics of human cloning and stem-cell research of biotechnology. “The novel is the relationship between Ishiguro's clones and human society is one between created beings and creator-deities, then the novel's concerns may be far more theological than readings have hitherto acknowledged” (Tsao 218). The novel brings up the ethical issues and the power of biotechnology to create life and mistreatment of such creations, which contradicts with the set norms of theology. In the world of *Never Let Me Go* human beings become an object, science has become an instrument as a creator taking the status of gods, and challenging the principle of nature by cutting the creations' lives short (220). When Kathy H speaks herself “I am thirty one years old, and I have been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough I know but actually, they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That will make it almost exactly twelve years” (Ishiguro 3). She speaks about her death that is coming soon, which will not be a natural death that will be decided by the creator. Contradictorily, the scientific creators neglect ethical values of human in the novel.

Significant scientific advances in the world cannot be undermined and there is no stopping too. The human ambitious intelligence and mind have crossed the limit of mortality to prove nothing impossible and in their understanding there lacks the reverence of super natural creator. And in Genesis the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (11:6). This is the beginning of scientific era where the scientific discoveries have no end. “Scientists have become successful to create human clones to donate their organs to save human life from life threatening illnesses to bring dead back to life. This is a great achievement for the humanity” (Tsao 214). Science has able to save the millions lives on earth in other hand there is a question raised by the one sect of community whether the process is ethically correct? There has been a long debate going on between two, one in favor of science and another one is in favor of religion. As Alexandru-Corneliu ARION states that:

One of the most disputed chapters in the last millennium human debate is that of the relation between religion and science, or between the model of faith and that of human reason concerning the true knowledge of man and universe. In fact, this very relationship between the two domains of knowledge has been a subject of study since classical antiquity, addressed

by philosophers, theologians, scientists, and others. Perspectives from different cultures and historical epochs are so diverse, with some characterizing the relationship as one of conflict, others describing it as one of harmony, while others proposing little interaction (51).

The relationship between religion and biotechnology still a question of dispute. In *Never Let Me Go*, we could see uniquely narrated insight into both religious life and biotechnology in our own world. The novel shares the tale about humans in relation to the gods and about biotechnological creation. Clones as students in the novel are the creation of biotechnology however; their emotions, feelings, desires to live longer, wishes to have sexual relations are beyond scientific miracles. Their ethical values to live as human beings have been denied by science, which is the paradox between the technology and religion. In one instance, Kathy and Tommy appeal for a deferral when they are in the home of Marie-Claude (Madame) and Miss Emily, which is the final bastion of Hailsham. Tommy and Kathy have hoped for, are nothing more than that, just a hope. When Kathy asks “Is it the case, then that deferrals don’t exist? There’s nothing you can do?” Miss Emily replies, “There’s no truth in the rumor. I ‘m sorry. I truly am” (Ishiguro 253). They don’t exist, they are just a product and clones, they are not considered as human. “The novel invites us to identify with both parties in the creature—creator relationship, the clones and the human” (220). The ethical values of human are neglected in the novel.

Ishiguro does not speak about religion explicitly. In the novel, Christianity appears to remain only in the form of relics: during the adolescent years, the three main clone characters—Ruth, Kathy, and Tommy—take to hanging out in the yard of an “old church... with very old gravestones and where everything was overgrown.”(Ishiguro 192) During that time Ruth tries to manipulate situations, she is determined that Tommy will not want to leave her in order to have a relationship with Kathy so she twists and manipulates Kathy’s words, putting Kathy in false position in front of Tommy. Ruth says, “It’s not just me, sweetie. Kathy here finds your animals a complete hoot” (192). It expresses even clones have human feelings of jealousy. The feelings reflects Ruth’s natural love towards Tommy. The human beliefs and thoughts are come afore technology. Similarly, “Old Keffers”, the caretaker at the community where they reside, is rumored to be religious: “dead against not just pom, but sex in general”, and therefore old-fashioned and outdated” (134). Even though the clones and the “guardians” (the adult authority figures who teach and care for the clone children at Hailsham) express belief in human beings' possession of “souls”, their understanding of the concept lacks any reference to any super natural creator of those souls (260). However, scholars as Davie and Marsh have noted that—the society of *Never Let Me Go* is not as post-religious as it may appear or even claim. Rather, traditional Christianity has made way for a new religious order in which human beings have themselves become

deities (Davie 43, and Marsh 21).

The deity status of humans themselves—as implied by the revelation toward the novel's end that the clone children are encouraged to produce artwork not to shed insight into their souls but to prove that they have them at all (Tsao 219). Students and that they are not religious because of this, but despite this, they still believe in the somewhat religious concept of the soul.

Believing in soul does not mean one is religious, the soul still has an element of faith to it and questions are raised as to why Madame and the guardians chose to make the students believe in the idea of a soul. If they have chosen to hide religion and abandon morality, yet that is the purpose of Hailsham, to prove clones as people, of course which ultimately fails. The purpose of clone children is to donate organs. “*Never Let Me Go* calls us to rethink what gives our lives value and why we value religion, it asks us to reassess the reasons we value biotechnological innovation. If we perceive purpose as the only feature that gives our lives worth, we are in danger of imposing the same narrow definition of “worth” on any life that science and technology has enable” (Taso 226). The novel speaks truth without error. This is the war between science and religion. As Rick Warren asserts that, without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope, but for some Christian writers, the goodness of God derives not from the purpose he gives us, but his ability to love his creatures whether they fulfil their purpose or not (30).

In the novel, we do not see love and kindness for the clones. They are informed from the beginning they are organ donors. When they learn that they are clones of someone, in frustration, Ruth afterwards declares the impossibility of her “possible” who “has more than a hint of Ruth” about her—actually being her human model: “We are modeled from trash, junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps... that’s what we come from if you want to look for possible, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that’s where you’ll find where we all came from” (217). Ruth expresses her bitterness for being created as a human. They are created without any moral value, they are nothing but for the purpose to live until they are able to donate organs they are able to provide services.

Ishiguro's novel thus approaches the issue of biotechnological ethics from an unexpected theological angle. Alternatively, to put it another way, if cloning is itself a divine act of creation, the novel's examination of bioethics is necessarily an examination of the ethics surrounding the relationship between divine creators and their creations. Martin Šemelák speaks:

...the novel’s text does not contain the word ‘death’ itself. Yet, there are specific terms, which substitute other words. Ishiguro introduces the

term ‘completion,’ referring to both the end of the clone’s participation in the donation programme and simultaneously to the clones’ demise. Here I propose a point of view where the ‘completion,’ together with the concept of the fourth donation, function as synonyms and, at the same time, euphemisms, for death. In addition, there are more words which may be perceived in a similar way, as they are directly related to the theme of death (11).

Clones-donors do not act willingly, because they have their organs taken from them. Calling such a taking a “donation” is a cruel misnomer, a catachresis in the sense of abuse. Such a reading is bolstered by a consideration of what the final donation—the one in which the “donor” gives all her organs, including the ones she cannot live without—is called: “completing” (Snaza 224). It seems science does not have any sentiments and emotions involve in the process of creating its creation. Tabooed by many religions and a problem in many societies the word ‘suicide’ is used once in the novel *Never Let Me Go*. It is interestingly mentioned in relation to fences, one of the recurring objects (or symbols) in the text: One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence (Ishiguro 77). The students have realization that their lives are worthless and they are only a product and clones to donate organs. Their desires and hopes are nothing matters in the world of science.

Futuristic World

What could be the futuristic world if there is paradox between religion and biotechnology? It could be as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* which is described as a dystopian society where Napoleon, a pig, represents Joseph Stalin in a farmyard satire on Stalinist Russia and how power corrupts or could be a Utopian world as described by Thomas More. Utopia is a place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions. Dystopia is a futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. The novel *Never Let Me Go* hunches us the new world could be full of discoveries that could be dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system or could be utopia where all will be happy and live healthy life without any problems and challenges. We can call it perfect world. Most dystopian works present a world in which oppressive societal control and the illusion controlled by technology—through computers, robots, and/or scientific means. Mark Fisher states that:

Never Let Me Go focuses on an “ideological state apparatus,” an English

boarding school, Hailsham, in an alternative twentieth century. The truth of the school is known to all, but, in the typical English way, it cannot be said out loud (one teacher is sacked for explicitly stating what the pupils already know): Hailsham is a training academy for clones, whose role will be to provide organs for the wider human population. (Fisher 31).

The futuristic world is ahead of the times; advance with technology. The novel *Never Let Me Go* is one of the mirrors of possible envisaged world. It gives a clear picture about the technology as a creator and their creations where traditional forms of human values are rejected. Gabriel Griffin has resisted consigning *Never Let Me Go* purely to “the realm of metaphor” that warns against “the dehumanized normalization” of the ethical atrocities biotechnology may prove capable of (63).

Conclusion

In *Never Let Me Go*, the relationship between religion and biotechnology is not explicitly discussed however; their existence and power are reflected instantaneously. Biotechnology has been portrayed as a deity that creates creatures in the novel. The scientists are able to discover the secret to successful human cloning, enabling them to create living beings whose organs are used to save people from life-threatening illness- to bring the dead back to life. This discovery is good for the human world who are going to die and get second life. However, there are absence of spiritual and human values in the process and the suffering of clones their emotions, desires, feelings as human beings are neglected.

In the novel Ishiguro reveals that biotechnological research and creations are undertaken for practical reason, and that this would be far more ethically sound than the creation of life to serve our own human needs. Technology has given human beings, a great power. To some extent, it gives validity of human divinity in the world. However, doctrine of theology has been denied. In few chapters, Ishiguro tries to bring religion as an anecdote to bring hope in clones to live normal life however; there is a lacking of its significant impact. The novel shows ethical dilemmas and raises questions: How far does technology can take future world neglecting human values? Is the discovery necessary for humanity? Without ethical value, can technology survive? The novel approaches the issue of biotechnological ethics from an unexpected theological angle. The experiments in cloning and stem-cell research, the solution's details somewhat remain hazy in disregard of religion. Clones are treated as an object. The scientists as creators create clones for the medical purpose; they don't have any other reason to save them whole life. Once the purpose completes the life of clones also completes.

Paradoxically, the novel has shown a gap between ethical values and human research. Science can bring miracles in the world to save humanity however, in lacking of spiritual values could lead into unpleasant situations. For example,

in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Shelly's *Frankenstein*, we find that Eve and Adam are fallen from their grace in *Paradise Lost* because of disobeying the God. The first words of *Paradise Lost* state that the poem's main theme will be "Man's first Disobedience." The angel Michael leads Adam and Eve out of paradise. The message is clear if someone disobeys the law of God, they have to face the consequences by themselves. Similarly, the gifted scientist Victor Frankenstein who succeeds in creating Frankenstein, he thought he could create a perfect specimen as he has imagined, although it becomes a hideous monster who is later rejected by Victor himself and humankind. It conveys message to the world that if anyone goes beyond nature, it brings disaster. Thus, *Never Let Me Go*, perceives a paradox between religion and of biotechnology. It has ruptured the traditional belief that has raised questions on scientific creations which has demoralized the human values in the name of divine creation.

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