

On the control of reproduction — prenatal diagnosis and similar methods of reproduction technology

Mao Naka

Professor, Kobe University

In this paper, I seek to philosophically explore the meaning of reproduction control in reproductive technology, especially prenatal diagnosis and preimplantation diagnosis (of a fertilized egg). I will focus on the relation between reproduction and the body and the differences between the sexes, referring to the concept of “the Other” by E. Levinas, feminist theory, and recent discussions on bioethics.

All human beings are born and die, but not all of them bear a child. This statement has two meanings. One is that not all human beings have a child of their own, and the other is that not all bear a child physically, that is through their own body; in other words, there is a gender which doesn't reproduce itself. Thus, when we examine the problems of reproduction, we necessarily have to take into account the differences between individuals and between the sexes. The consideration of these differences is one of the most important discussion points for us.

The reason why the above-said differences play an essential role in reproduction is that reproduction is an act that can be separable from the body in theory. In this respect, the act of reproduction differs from other acts such as eating or growing older, getting sick and dying. It is decidedly different in the sense that while it is undoubtedly a physical act, it is separable from the body.

This understanding presents us with a concrete situation : there is a room (even though it is very little) for us to intervene in the process of reproduction and to choose whether or not we get pregnant and whether or not we continue to get pregnant : by means of contraception, abortion, or reproductive technology. Almost all these forms of reproductive technology will assist in expanding this space to intervene and to exercise one's choice to a greater degree than ever before, and to separate any other process from the body more drastically. Since if we intend to control the phenomena occurring in our body as we want, it might be better to separate them from the body because we cannot control them perfectly.

Thus, we can reach a conclusion that in attempting to control reproduction, we seek to ultimately control and overcome the incalculability or uncontrollability of physical phenomena, in other words, to overcome their “alterity.” If this is true, then what will be the consequences and in which situations will we find ourselves in when we overcome

the alterity of reproduction by perfectly controlling it? These are the problems I will deal with by referring to some examples on prenatal diagnosis or preimplantation diagnosis.