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"Not to be born is best
when all is reckoned in, but once a man has seen the light
the next best thing, by far, is to go back
back where he came from, quickly as he can.
For once his youth slips by, light on the wing
lightheaded . . . what mortal blows can he escape
what griefs won't stalk his days?"
Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 1224sqq.[1]

The older citizens of the chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus* sing a melancholy descant on the miseries of old age. "Not to be born is best / when all is reckoned in . . ." is a familiar Greek saying, but Sophocles adapts the adage, as the English classicist Bernard Knox says, to his dramatic theme: the chorus' vision of the blind old man as the supreme example of man's helpless misery, "once his youth slips by." Oedipus, it seems, must endure the myriad pains and unrelenting suffering in his old age. The chorus likens the fallen king to a cape: though buffeted by the raging waves and blustery winds from all sides, the cape retains its original form. Oedipus is beaten and lost, humiliated, ruined, yet despite his tortured fate, he prevails and, in the end, triumphs over his fate.

Twenty years before *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles had written *Oedipus Rex*, making Oedipus, in the prime of his life, the protagonist. In the dramatic fall from grace, within one day, Oedipus, the great man, a revered king, likened to a god, was reduced to a blind beggar, despised as a brute of a man. Shortly before his own death, Sophocles completed *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which Oedipus, after having survived indescribable hardships of life, would once again make a miraculous transformation within one day, from his paltry and shunned existence as a fallen and ruined man, to that of a powerful and prescient divinity, absolved of his guilt, accepting of his fate. In this way, Sophocles perhaps wanted to leave the following thought to his fellow Athenians: Those who withstand all hardships with indomitable courage and never lose their nobility to the end, even if they fall to the depths of misery, will be forever given invisible influence and favor by the gods.

Should King Laius and Queen Jocasta have killed their unwanted newborn, who was later to become Oedipus, since they were afraid of the fulfillment of the oracle? Trying desperately to escape his own fate, should Oedipus, as a young man, have fought with and killed an older man who stood in his path along the three-forked road? Considering the travail of his terrible suffering afterwards, with the fuller knowledge of his true identity, should we think that it would have been better for Oedipus if he had not been born at all? The Oedipus myth raises some difficult questions for us living in the present age. By broadening the preceding question to include all of us, we could ask ourselves if we too would be better off never having lived in the first place. The following articles in this issue show some ambitious attempts to pursue how people who suffer from various human predicaments can discover or devise better ways of living, despite their challenges and suffering.

In his provocatively argued book, *Better Never to Have Been*, South African philosopher David Benatar criticises the common assumption that being brought into existence is always a benefit, while not being born creates no harm for anyone. According to Benatar's anti-natalist argument, procreation is irresponsible and is never morally justifiable. Kei UDONO neatly describes and assesses some fundamental assertions of Benatar's ethics of procreation, suggesting that concepts such as 'good' and 'bad' are unclearly defined by Benatar, thus creating definitional ambiguity and vagueness, for instance, whether 'good' and 'bad' are synonyms

for 'pleasure' and 'pain', respectively. The themes of Benetar's book and Udono's critique may at first seem dismal, but the themes have actually been part of a long philosophical conversation since ancient times, concerning how best to accept mortality, frailty, illness, and death.

Based on the conceptual analysis of 'human organism' and 'person', found in American philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker's book *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View*, Yuichi MINEMURA gives a principled critique of the analytic philosophical development of the Person Theory. Minemura insists that the more fundamental element of a human being that determines the beginning and the end of life is not the presence or absence of a first-person perspective, but that of living organism. Using the latter criterion, Minemura challenges the reader to rethink how best to define birth and death.

Today, in Japan, it is required that ethical review committees (ERCs) for medical and health research involving human subjects incorporate not only 'experts in the natural sciences' and 'experts in the humanities and social sciences,' but also 'lay members' who can more authentically provide a viewpoint both of the general public and research participants. Yuki SAKAIDA et al. investigate how current 'lay members' see their own and other committee members' roles, adding some useful thoughts about how best to retain and fill lay member positions. Based on circumstances found in ERCs elsewhere, where the importance of the role of 'lay members' is being more increasingly acknowledged, Sakaida et al. clarify the current situation and challenges for ERCs in Japan.

As is well known to those active in applied ethics relating to matters of health and the environment, in 1970, the American biochemist Van Rensselaer Potter coined the term "bioethics" to describe a new philosophy that sought to integrate biology, ecology, medicine, and human values. Atsuki KUGA describes in detail how viewpoints found in the discourse of environmental ethics contribute to the handling of various bioethical issues, while also correlating the two concepts of 'interdependence' and 'sustainability.' To illustrate the preceding, Kuga uses the educational program for sustainability founded by the Gaia Education Program, which emphasizes an "awareness of interdependence" in its curriculum. Transition Town movements in Japan are also introduced and connected to broader discussions in applied – particularly environmental – ethics.

Today, in Japan, as the population continues to decrease and as its median age increases, the ratio of people with Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD) continues to increase as well, while at the same time, care and residential systems capable of responding to the needs of older adults with BPSD are more sorely needed than ever. Ryuji YAMAZAKI et al. consider two studies exploring the potential of robotic media that could promote changes in subjectivity in elderly adults with BPSD, helping them to become more communicative and connected with others. Yamazaki's article provokes us to consider the urgency of the problem of what we need to provide for the growing number of elderly adults with BPSD, so they may still enjoy life and live with dignity.

Lastly, as a sequal to an article appearing in the 2017 edition of our journal,[2] Sylwia Maria OLEJARZ analyzes the urgent issue of women in distress, due to unwanted pregnancy, by comparing the socio-cultural backgrounds underlying child abandonment and baby hatches in Japan and Poland. Olejarz suggests that in Japan, only the idea of a baby hatch has been imported, but not the organizational and theoretical structures of social support, traditions, values, and norms that must underpin the use and maintenance of a baby hatch as an anonymous method of safely relinquishing an unwanted infant to competently trained staff. A comprehensive philosophical and ethical study, including a full historical account and an analysis of the current situation based on a broader international perspective, is expected.

Endnotes

1 Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, translated by Robert Fagles, introduction and notes by Bernard Knox, Penguin Classics, 1982.

2 Normally, an article contribution for a second consecutive year is not permitted, according to regulations, but this article sequel was accepted, after special approval by the editing committee.