

Neighbor and Word in the Technopolis

By

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At the Symposium on Metaphysics, Culture and Morality organized by the International Society of Metaphysics at Taipei, Taiwan in December, 1988, I was first introduced to Prof. Tomonobu Imamichi and to his creative involvement in Eco-Ethica.

The participants received a one-page outline of his paper which I took to be a thematic reduction of his eco-ethical concerns. The main themes were two: *Moral Creation* which involves the enterprise Prof. Imamichi calls "aretology": moving by way of semantic enlargement and transfiguration to creation, and an address to the subject which traces the development from "hypostasis" to "ecology". His second point was *Logical Reversal*, which contrasted the "present practical syllogism" to the "classical practical syllogism", and pointed to the emergence of a new classification that moved away from the hylemorphic matrix of Aristotelian thought to the technological category of "function" and "functionality" and consequently from definitions as manifestations of "nature" to definitions as statements of "operation".

My contribution to the 10th Taniguchi Symposium on Eco-Ethica, which I understand is to be the last in the series, will consist in reflections on eco-ethical concerns gathered under three headings suggested by Prof. Imamichi himself: *first*, the reduction of acting to behaving; *second*, the deconstruction of metaphysics/ontology as "scientia prima" or first philosophy; *third*, the technological situation as transformation of language. I concede that this thematic analysis is artificial and contrived because eco-ethica, as I understand it, is all of this in the same breath and measure.

The Reduction of Acting to Behaving

It was in a paper entitled "Language and Attitude" that Prof. Imamichi discussed at some length his thesis that in a state of technological cohesion "everything is ready for every person, but everyone should *do* according to the behaviour-index set by the machine. There is in fact the dimension of behaviour but there is no horizon for act." (*Acta Institutionis Philosophiae et Aestheticae*, 4:1986).

Human life in the technological milieu is institutionally mechanized and all will go well as long as the directions for the operation of machines are followed to the letter. It is in fact striking how this type of prescribed behaviour has invaded even the "ludic" aspects of living. Where recreation and games used to summon creativity and inventiveness in the unfettered play of spirit technology has introduced recreational facilities that have to be operated according to fixed rules and that go by fixed patterns, yet the game or play "recreates" precisely because it *does not have to be* done; once begun, however, it calls forth art and skill in a free commitment of spirit.

Tomonobu Imamichi therefore rightly calls attention to the fact that prescribed behaviour is becoming not merely an occasional stance but is becoming the mode of doing established by a technological environment. In this environment it is compliance with operational rules that matters, not ethics. It is in this context that eco-ethica questions the sufficiency of an ethics of the interhuman.

If I read Prof. Imamichi correctly the basic concern of eco-ethica is with the *humanitas* of man in a technological climate. He says:

The excess of legality is the excess of the external negative which prevents us from the positive initiative to do good. In the extreme this means that one awaits the positive imperative issued from legal authority. There is no spontaneity and the being without spontaneity is no longer human but the subject of a heteronomic function. (*Acta*: 1986)

Eco-ethica is the human inquiry then that arises in the face of the threat that the human being becomes captive to various secular powers and irrational authorities that have supplanted the authority of classical morality. (See Imamichi's "Preface" to the *Acta Institutionis Philosophiae et Aestheticae*, 7:1989) In the *Festschrift* edited by his friends, Imamichi's article, "Auto-Installation of Art and the Eco-Ethical Dimension" enunciates the problem clearly:

The love for the neighbor before modern technology originated from the sentiment of having actual personal contact within a given locality. But in the vast and effective technical cohesion all mankind in synchronic relation is actually the neighbor. In the physical person of our act is now the unseen person. Therefore the fundament of morality is not the emotion seen on the face of the near neighbor, but the reasonable consideration for the unseen being. (*Aesthetica et Caloniologia: Festschrift for Tomonobu Imamichi*, 1988)

"Humanity" and the "neighbor" – these are concerns of eco-ethica even as they must be re-defined by a global situation modified rather, defined in turn – by technology.

I shall now address the opposition between acting as the modality of human spontaneity and behaving as fulfillment of directions for operation. To be human man must ACT but it is this that is rendered problematic when human deportment gravitates around machines that are operated.

In circles of Catholic philosophers the work of Karol Wojtyla on *The Acting Person* became familiar after its translation and publication by the Analecta Husserliana series. It is an attempt at philosophical anthropology by way of a philosophical reflection on human acting. Wojtyla contrasts *acting* not with *behaving* as Prof. Imamichi does but with *happening*. It is the experience of efficacy that for him sets the distinctive seal on acting, for the experience of efficacy is the experience man has of being the source and the subject of the action. While immanently involved in the action as its subject man transcends the immediacy of involvement by positing himself as subject and source of the action.

My acting manifests the concreteness and subjectiveness of an ego that is a self-conscious cause of action. (Wojtyla: 1979). When at every turn man is domesticated by what Prof. Imamichi calls "external negative imperatives" or dictated on by the rules of operation of automats and technological objects then the spontaneity that engenders the efficacy of the acting person recedes.

Obviously, the design and fabrication of the technological object or environment is an act but shall a new antagonism of classes then arise from an opposition between those who design and program the automat and those bound to its operations? If eco-ethica is a proposal that man be human within – not despite – a technological milieu, then eco-ethica is also a protest against the aristocracy of technological inventiveness. The use of the machine then must be an act of efficacy and a moment of transcendence for man. This is to say that man must act by using the machine.

In a commentary on *Laborem Exercens*, one of John Paul II's well-received encyclicals, Prof. Biffi calls attention to a point in the encyclical in which, I am sure, Tomonobu Imamichi would recognize affinity with his sentiments.

One of the developments in recent history the papal statement identifies as occasioning re-thinking is "the widespread introduction of automation into many spheres of production". Almost in unison with Prof. Imamichi, Biffi remarks that such a fact, together with other factors, will lead "to new formulations of personal existence". Eco-ethica, I like to think is an articulation of these new formulations of personal existence.

Laborem Exercens pictures technology as a double-headed Janus for while the introduction of automation facilitates work by relieving work of age-old fatigue

and thereby allowing quantitative as well as qualitative improvement, still "it is also a fact that, of some instances, technology can cease to be man's ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work 'supplants' him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of its slave." (*Laborem Exercens*, 5.4).

Once more, then, of connection with a discussion on technology as a challenge to "humanitas" their arises the concern for creative spontaneity which Tomonobu Imamichi has articulated.

Biffi proceeds to suggest that the wide-spread disaffection with work has developed from the dictatorship of technology and a culture of behavioural domestication by operational instructions. Workers, says Biffi, are so situated as to reduce them to passive executors of plans entirely drawn up without their participation, and this in turn becomes the established pattern in the measure that technology substitutes ever more for the worker's creativity and intelligence. (Biffi: 1989). It is then the "eclipse of the human act" that brings with it the ennui of the working man.

The passivity of man is unavoidable, and Wojtyla quite insightfully reminds us that the act, as experience of efficacy, presupposes the passivity-activity conjugate in man.

In "Auto-Installation of Art and Eco-Ethical Dimensions", Tomonobu Imamichi deals with the concept of "neighbor" in connection with defining the problematic of eco-ethica, a concept which, at this point of our discussion, I would like to invoke. I would like to concede to Prof. Imamichi that we can understand "neighbor" as descriptive of "the cohesion of all mankind in synchronic relation", but I would like to introduce it into our discussion as an ethical admonition.

Again with Prof. Imamichi I must divorce the concept of "neighbor" from proximity-tangibility-visibility since their conjunction has been surpassed in the technopolis. In a paraphrase of the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" Paul Ricoeur presents "neighbor" as ethical admonition being in the habit of making oneself available in such a way that proximity is established not by physical or geographic juxtaposition but by encounter between persons and not roles. (Ricoeur, "The Socratic and the Neighbor", Ricoeur: 1965).

Christian eschatology carries the ethical admonition to transcendental dimensions and dares to prophesy the meaning of encounters especially with the "least". If, in Ricoeur's paraphrase, the least are those left out by history as residual because their engagements are too elemental, too average, too routinary, the supernumeraries forever consigned to anonymity, then the "least" in the technopolis are not the celebrated inventors of machines and programmes but the anonymous multitudes who use them and who submit themselves to the discipline of

operation receding thereby into oblivion. The neighbor is he who keeps off the fateful hour of betrayal, who, whether proximate or unseen guarantees that he who handles the technological object and operates it acts - perhaps by submitting to the regimen of its operation - but most assuredly acts.

Ricoeur would have us move from the *level of reflection* on which the socius is opposed to the neighbor, the factory-line from the neighborhood encounter to the *level of meditation* that surpasses the opposition and, beneath a theology of the "kingdom of God", considers the "socius" and the "neighbor" two faces of the same charity. Quite to the point, to my mind, insofar as eco-ethica is concerned, Ricoeur says:

There are very few pure events, and they cannot be retained nor even forecast and organized a minimum *dégré* of institutionalization. We must take our analysis one step further. The object of charity often appears only when I attain, in the other man, a common condition which takes on the form of a collective misfortune: wages, colonial exploitation, racial discrimination. Then my neighbor is concrete in the plural and abstract in the singular.

"Neighbor" is then the ethical rubric that domesticates the technological ambience, tames the machine, subsumes behaviour and operation in ACT, and allows the technopolis to be the locus of encounter. As "socius", in the ultimate analysis, is not opposed to "neighbor", "neighborhood" will not be a retreat from the technopolis but will be its humanization. Part of the creative energy of eco-ethica must go into spelling out the demands of neighborliness ought to be the "return" from the "exile" of purpose-end-goal-whole from the individual's place in the factory-line or technological set-up, and from the individual factory or workshop to the vision of well-being so that man can truly ACT. Thus, too, does eco-ethica manifest social justice as one of its shades.

Metatechnica as First Philosophy and the Transformation of Language

Arguing both from the actual proceedings of contemporary metaphysical systems, notably Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas, and from the linguistic peculiarities of Indo-European languages that allow for something like the "*analogia entis*" of Aristotle and the Scholastic philosophers, Tomonobu Imamichi proposes a rethinking of ontology as metaphysics and as first philosophy. In the paper he read last year for the 9th Symposium, he approvingly quoted Prof. McCormick for whom both the *possibilists'* notion of the world as well as the *atomists'* did not provide us with the metaphysical and ontological account required by eco-ethical inquiry. In reaction, Prof. Imamichi said:

He (McCormick) is absolutely right, if the method or the traditional approach refers to a metaphysical, ontological mode of being of the world. But, in a certain way, eco-ethica is world-ethics; on the one hand eco-ethica must identify with the world; on the other hand, the world must somehow link itself to morality. (*Inter objective Considerations of Eco-ethica*, 1989)

Aristotle, in *The Metaphysics*, leaves no doubt about what the concern of metaphysics is, and about what "being" means.

There are several senses in which a thing may be said to "be" as we pointed out previously in our book on the various senses of the words; . . . While "being" has all these senses, obviously that which "is" primarily is the "what", which indicates the substance of the thing.

If anything, it is that which walks or sits or is healthy that is an existent thing. Now these are seen to be more real because there is something definite which underlies them (i.e., the substance or individual), which is implied in such a predicate . . . Clearly then it is in virtue of this category that each of the others also is. Therefore that which is primarily, i.e., not in a qualified sense but without qualification must be substance. (*Metaphysics*, VII, 1)

Already the link between metaphysics and the use or transformation of language was not unknown to Aristotle. It will at once noted that the identification of "substance" as the "terminus a quo" of metaphysics takes place in the context of predication. This fact was not missed by Aristotle's great Scholastic commentator, Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle's approach, according to Thomas, consists in establishing the truth about "being" by appropriating the truth about the nature of substance. Aquinas then highlights the predicative aspect of the discussion on substance: when we state what a thing is, we do not answer in terms of quality or quantity but in terms of that which signifies substance, i.e., a man or a god. Thus terms signifying substance express what a thing is in an unqualified sense (*Commentary on the Metaphysics*, VII, L. 1 c 1245 – 1269).

"To be" therefore is to be "substance", and to be substance is to be" the ultimate substratum no longer predicated of anything else" (*Metaphysics*, V, 8), "the compound of form and matter to which separability and that-ness belong" (*ibid.*, VII, 3), the entity which everything else and to which or in which everything else is predicated (*Categories*, 5). So apparently fundamental and basic is the notion of being as thing/substance that Aquinas had no hesitation designating it as the first and basic concept of the mind. The unforgettable lines of *De Veritate* testify to this: "Now, as Avicenna says, that which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts is being" (*De Veritate*, I, 1).

I would like to borrow Lonergan's phraseology to convey the classical concept of what it is to be something: a unity-identity-whole, primarily a given fact of nature. This brings us to the discussion on the concepts of "nature" and "form". Prof. Imamichi points out interestingly that while "form" used to be the basis of classification, isomorphisms and hereto functional apparatuses have given rise to classification by function.

Aquinas cites Aristotle as attributing primacy to form in regard to natural substances, since it is form that actualizes the potency of the material substrate (*Commentary of the Metaphysics*, VII, L.2: c 1270-1305). Of natural things, Aristotle held that that out of which they come to be is matter, and that by which they come to be is something that exists naturally. That from which they are

produced is nature, the type according to which they are produced is nature, that by which they produced is "formal" nature, which referred to specific sameness. (*Metaphysics*, VII, 7).

On the other hand, in regard to products of artisanship – hence products of *techne* – the essential characteristic was that "from art proceed the things of which the form is in the soul of the artist" (*Metaphysics*, VII, 7). There will, I think, be no problem in re-reading this as the determination-design-specification-programming of the technological object by the technological attitude and objectivating stance of man.

Aquinas comments on this: between things generated by nature and things generated by art lies the difference in the proper cause of generation. Where the proper cause of generation is intrinsic to a thing, then it is nature; where the proper cause of generation is existinsic to a thing, then it is art. At the heart of "*techne*" then – or "*ars*"/"*praxis*" is the dominion of the mind over the thing which is produced, for a product of art is that whose productive *form* exists in the mind (*Commentary on the Metaphysics*, VII, I. 6: c 1381-1416).

Therefore, even as Prof. Imamichi has reason to say that in the Occidental tradition, there is no contrast between nature and technic insofar as technic is one of the variations of nature, I hope to have shown that at least in the Aristotelian tradition – and consequently also in the High Scholasticism of Aquinas – the discussion around "form" and "nature" occasions a distinction between things that are generated naturally and those that are generated by artisanship/technology.

Quite significant to me from the foregoing discussion is the remark on the dominion of the mind over the products of art and *techne*. I prefer then to think of the technological object not as a variation of the natural object, nor even as it's imitation. There is much to commend the insight of Ricoeur who, citing Mounier, holds that the machine is an extension of thought. Ricoeur then says:

But above all, it is the spoken word which effects the passage from the tool to the machine. As Emmanuel Mounier said in *La Petite Peur du XXe siecle*, "the machine is not, as is the tool, a mere material prolongation of our limbs. It is of another order: an annex of our language, an auxiliary language of mathematics to penetrate, stamp out, and reveal the secret of things, their implicit intentions, their untapped possibilities." (Ricoeur, "Work and the Word"; Ricoeur: 1965)

Within the abstractions and concepts of geometry and mathematics, abstractions which mark the conversion of language into pure thought, all our knowledge is contracted in such wise that the technical world today is the invasion of the verbal world into the muscular world (Ricoeur).

I can then see that as *metatechnica* will be concerned with form and function, as first philosophy it will have to be a philosophy of WORD as *critique* and *master* of *techne/praxis/production*. It will have to contend with the fact that *praxis*

annexes the spoken word to itself as the language of planning although the spoken word originally reposes in reflecting aloofness and is to be distinguished from production precisely because it is consideration of meaning.

Returning to the concern with social justice this means that man in the technopolis and in the center of an automated workshop must speak his word, that the "form" not only of that which he produces, but that which he operates is in his soul so that the word also allows the aloofness of domination. Thus a transfer of technology that does not come with a learning-communicating-speaking of the word is a threat to humanitas, an imposition of one class on another.

Many philosophers have solemnly announced the obsolescence of the language of substance-ontology. I grant their sincerity and earnestness but this has not changed the fact that the ambit of ordinary language is marked by thinking on things as substances. I must insist with Prof. Imamichi, however, that this should not be normative for first philosophy.

As Derrida traces the fortunes of French philosophical thinking he may have some suggestions for us who must seriously embark on eco-ethica. He addresses himself to the question why critiques or delimitations of anthropologism have been considered essentially anthropocentric. Quite significantly it is the reading of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre in France that Derrida takes to be indices of his problem, the very same philosophers whose systems Tomonobu Imamichi has read as symptomatic of the decline in metaphysics as ontology.

Derrida's reading of Heidegger yields many of the themes that have also been our concerns and which, undoubtedly, will continue to challenge eco-ethica: the "we" – which we are – and which is open to an understanding of Being also inscribes the formal structure of the question of Being within metaphysics and by the use of "is", the copula problematic to Prof. Imamichi, within the Indo-European linguistic frame.

The choice of Dasein as the privileged text is the employment of phenomenology's principle of presence. As a consequence the thinking of Being remains the thinking of man; that which is threatened in the extension of metaphysics and technology is the essence of man, and the concern to re-think the essence of man is concern that man should be *human*. The destruction of onto-theology is the awakening of the co-propriety of the name of man and the name of Being.

Derrida brings his narration of the fortunes of current French thinking to a close which should also suggest the difficulty of the project eco-ethica faces in restating, re-defining, probably deconstructing first philosophy. Derrida calls this the "strategic bet". Shall we deconstruct without changing terrain? If so one would only confirm that which one allegedly deconstructs. Should we decide, however, to change terrain in a disruptive or discontinuous fashion, would not the very use of language take us back to the very terrain we are supposed to abandon? I might add: to what extent is a change of terrain possible?

I have no answers to these questions but that eco-ethica must now face them certainly suggests that we are in serious business. □

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