

The Cyborg Saga: The Illusion of Power and the Downfall of the Captor

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You cannot step in the same river twice

The above mentioned quotation has been solidified as a timeless classic in the realm of philosophy, and has made its way into the many and different facets of certain disciplinal undertakings; these are words once uttered by a man who, like his contemporaries, endeavored to account for and explain the phenomenon of change – Heraclitus. His, and that of many other philosophers, is the belief that the world is not a pre-determined demesne, consisting of fixed meaning; it rather encompasses a constant unfolding of things and man is a perpetual participant to this.

This unfolding cannot be mastered in one grasp, not even in a million. Man experiences reality never in its totality; it always escapes our limitations, always leaving a vast space for further scrutiny and voyage. In the simple words of Fr. Roque Ferriols, SJ: "*Hindi kayang lunukin ang kabuuan ng meron¹; kumakagat lamang tayo*". In the face of the immensity of reality (being), man is humbled, if not belittled. Man feels his finitude; the walls of limitation close before him.

But amidst these panoramas, man thirsts for control – over himself, others and nature. Man is innately selfish, as some

¹ The author would choose to explain further the above-quoted phrase from *Fr. Roque Ferriols* in Filipino in order to give justice to the source. Ayon kay Padre Ferriols, mahiwaga at mayaman ang MERON. Ang MERON ay yaong lahat ng umiiral. Ang meron ay iyong totoong nangyayari at mangyayari pa lamang. Ako ay Meron. Ikaw ay Meron. Ang lahat ng umiiral ay Meron. Kaya nga kapag tinanong kita ng "Anong Meron?", ang agad na umuusbong bago pa man masabi kung ano nga ba talaga ang meron, ay ang katotohanan na may umiiral. Bukod pa sa bagay na tinutukoy, binibigkas na rin sa katanungang yaon na umiiral ka at ako'y ganoon rin. Ginamit ni Padre Ferriols ang "abot-tanaw" upang maihambing sa pagmumulat sa meron. Ayon sa kanya, "nakatingala akong tatanaw sa itaas. Payuko akong tatanaw sa baba. Lilingon ako sa kaliwa at sa kanan. Babaling ako sa harapan at sa likuran. Paaikutin ko ang aking mata, at pati ang ulo. Ibig na ibig kong tanawin ang lahat ng matatanaw. Ngunit, sa bawat dako, parang may sumasagupa sa aking tingin, na parang nagsasabi: hanggang dito ka lamang makakakita, lamapas dito hindi makaabot ang pag-unat ng iyong mata" (Roque J. Ferriols, SJ. *Pambungad sa Metapisika*. Quezon City: Office of Research and Publications, Ateneo de Manila University, 1991. 12). Tila nga ganoon ang nangyayari. Sa tuwing tayo ay titingin, tila palaging may hangganan ang ating nakikita. Laging may abot-tanaw. At kung nais nating malampasan pa ang natatanaw, kailangang gumalaw. At sa paggalaw na iyon, may bagong natatanaw. Subalit muling darating sa punto na wala na tayong makikita higit pa sa ating abot-tanaw sa kinatatayuan. Muling paggalaw na naman ang kinakailangan.

philosophers put it,² and has from time immemorial geared on the attempt of reducing the immensity of the world within his clench; trying to translate the calligraphies of nature in a language devoid of ambiguities and the *unknown* – a vernacular wherein everything is within the framework of the mind, or reason. This project has found its expression in the many facets of our society; technological advancement being one of its more prominent forefronts. And as man's desire for control and dominance escalates, with its every strand gearing towards comfort and convenience, ghettos rise from the rubbles of every power that he wins – prisons are molded both for the conquered and the conqueror.

Hence the question: Is man really powerful, or is the acquired control mere illusory – an illusion that clouds the eyes from seeing that at the end of the food chain which man has created, he has actually congealed himself at its bottom?

Necessity as the Mother of Inventions

As mentioned in the introduction, swift technological advancement is one of the more apparent manifestations of man's attempt to explain, control, or even dominate – in particular, nature. And we know for a fact that this threshold has been on the run since time immemorial. And to take a trance to simply have a peek of where it all begun, we may be pulled to as far as millions of epoch back; or even further.

But I think there is no need to take the reverie back to the complex chronicles of history just to have a grasp of what I am talking about. Maybe for now, it would suffice to know that it approximately started when humankind first made simple tools such as stone axes and bone arrow tips. It continued with learning how to start and control fire, with the making of pottery, baskets, cloth, and simple jewelry. The discovery that copper, repeatedly hammered and put into a fire, would not crack was followed by the discovery that alloys of tin and copper produced a strong and malleable bronze that could be used for swords and sickles. This discovery brought humanity from the Stone Age into the so-called Bronze Age about 3000 BC. And the rest is history.

And throughout the course of time, paradigm shifts have been on the roll. Before, the Earth took the grandiose position of being at the center of the universe, a geocentric universe wherein the planets

² Thomas Hobbes believed that man is born selfish; hence the Leviathan or the State, which is central in his works, is a *necessary* evil.

and fixed stars were embedded in concentric crystalline spheres that revolved around the Earth. It took a brave attempt from Nicolai Copernicus vis-à-vis loads of evidences to defy tradition, to de-center the Earth and grant the sumptuousness to a great ball of fire.

Technology has taken the same thoroughfare of constant change. And such shifts had cast upon society an enormous brunt. The introduction of the movable printing machine in the Middle Ages³ made writings of non-ecclesiastical thinkers and scholars accessible to common masses, slowly pulling out from the grasp of the Church or the scholastics the seemingly monopoly over knowledge. And although Einstein never intended his theory of relativity to be anything more than just explaining the then bewildering theory of light, war-headed and battle enthusiasts picked up bits and pieces of this legendary $E=mc^2$ formula to spearhead the creation of the atomic bomb; later on devastating Japan's Hiroshima and Nagasaki and making World War II a more electrifying scenario.

As roads began to sprout above grasslands, the need for better and more efficient vehicles came alongside it; hence the theatrical pouring down of flashy cars and automobiles. In a nutshell, the drastic changes in technology gush out from the relentlessly altering necessities of humanity. Indeed, necessity is the mother of inventions; technological transformations rained to meet humanity's perpetual lists of needs and wants.

Loving the Comfort

Today, technology is seen as a complex of contrivances and technical skills, put forth by human activity and developed as means to our ends. In this view, it is considered as an object that seems passive in itself; and man conceives it as activated by us only. As such, we see technology as a source of comfort; as one that is *utilized* to reach the desires of man. To spare time in defining technology nowadays is rather impasse, for it is a hackneyed reality.

³ The Medieval Ages was characterized by the dominance of the Ecclesiastical realm in the society. After the fall of Rome, the world witnessed the rise of the Papacy as an institution towards supremacy. Its dominance was felt in the economic sphere, socio-political threshold and educational realm. Since during the Medieval times agriculture was the main domain of livelihood (exemplified by the fact that the more land one owns, the wealthier he is), the Church, being feudal lords themselves, had dictated a vast portion of economical endeavors. Universities then were faith-oriented; clerics and bishops were the ones who shaped the young and eager minds of those times with things associated with faith and reason's subordination to it. The dominion of Metaphysics as the language of philosophy and of theology as the science of all sciences was wrote the chronicles of these centuries.

On this note, indeed, no precise aphorism can thoroughly expound the impact it has delivered upon our doorsteps. For one, it has brought about a vast horizon of coziness within our systems – be it personal or in the macro world. And the craze to grab the newest and coolest thingamajigs and gadgets in town has never been as mad as a March hare like this! No debate would, I believe, suffice to disprove the easiness and solace that technological advancement has pulled into the scenario and under the comfort of our beds.

Aside from these silver spoons that technology has pressed deep within our mouths, proficiency, accuracy and efficiency in work and labor will not be left behind as another set of benefits alongside this entity. Distances became mere footsteps away with the advent of more sophisticated telecommunication and lickety-split transportations. We use it for studying, leisure, work, or even just a simple chit-chat. Hence, machines have indeed been the language of contemporary epoch and to some extent, removed of these commodities, we become lame, crippled climbers in an uphill ascend. Technology, coupled with its comrades, has become an indispensable part of our day-to-day living, an inevitable item in our pockets. To some extent, it has become an additional “organ” in our already complicated body structure – a whopping and much-needed screw in our framework.

However, flipping the coin to its other side, there seems to be a labyrinth of slip-ups concealed beneath the happy faces of comfort. According to Heidegger⁴, we commit a fundamental mistake by treating technology as mere neutral or just an instrument of human control.

Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology. When we are seeking the essence of “tree,” we have to become aware that That which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees.

*Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological. Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.*⁵

⁴The Questions Concerning Technology, 1977.

⁵Ibid., 1.

Hence, Heidegger⁶ went on to say that technology is rather an autonomous organizing activity within which humans themselves are organized. It is not a mindless tool; it is, to the contrary, an active and encompassing system that wraps humanity within its grasp. Therefore, our belief of control over technology is at the end of the day an illusion.

This danger (or that which technology brings) attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself.

Just as humans have progressively limited the being of the natural objects around them, Heidegger observed, they too have acquired a progressively limited character or being. While we have come to think that we encounter only ourselves in the world, "in truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., in his essence."⁷

While all epochs of human evolution contain danger, the epoch of modern technology possesses the gravest danger because it is the epoch whose characteristic is to conduct humanity out of its own essence. Modern technology, in Heidegger's view, is the highest stage of misrepresentation of the essence of being human. In order to understand this danger completely and, certainly, in order to come to accept it as a correct analysis, would require a more extensive review of Heidegger's theory of human nature and its essence. In this mode of technology, we order the world with things standing-in-reserve for our use. When we demand use of these things, we no longer witness them in the sense of understanding (learning about) their manifold potentials, but merely as that under

⁶ First, we have to understand that technology, contrary to our perception of it as mere tool or means, is actually an active player in re-shaping humanity. According to Heidegger, at the outset, we are already enslaved by our misunderstanding as to what technology really is – i.e. its essence. For him, to better understand the essence of technology, and there the danger it subjects us to, we must first understand technology as *enframing* (*Ge-seill*). In Heidegger's own words, "enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological. On the other hand, all those things that are so familiar to us and are standard parts of an assembly, such as rods, pistons, and chassis, belong to the technological. The assembly itself, however, together with the aforementioned stock-parts, falls within the sphere of technological activity; and this activity always merely responds to the challenge of Enframing, but it never comprises Enframing itself or brings it about." (Heidegger, 10).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

which we have ordered them to be. In the gravest situation, we begin to order other human beings in the same way! Thus, we have "departments of human resources." We recognize in human beings around us their usefulness to us, not their genius. Thus, we witness them in artificially limited ways rather than enabling their coming-to-presence creatively as animated parts of our worlds.⁸

True, I side with everybody that there is no point at arguing as to whether technology is beneficial to humanity. It is! But I also think that we've become so engrossed to its charms that we had laid deeper beneath the slumber of passivity about how technology has also become a threat to humanity.

Bring out the Cyborgs! Are You One of Them?

Heidegger pointed out that the danger of technology was that humanity was dominating everything and exploiting all things (beings) for his/her own satisfaction, as if man were a subject in control and the objectification of everything were the problem. It's as if man holds the strings to this puppet show. According to him, "Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, 'get' technology 'spiritually in hand'. We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more technology threatens to slip from human control."⁹

And this is the very project that Renè Descartes initiated at a time when Renaissance movement¹⁰ was opening the windows

⁸ Philosophy 104: History of Western Philosophy, Course Notes for Martin Heidegger, <http://www4.hmc.edu:8001/humanities/beckman/PhilNotes/heid.htm>, (Accessed on 1 March 2013).

⁹ Heidegger, 2.

¹⁰ Dating from approximately 1450-1600, the Renaissance period in history was a time of transition in the arts, literature, religion, science, and philosophy. Although looking forward to modern thought, this period also revived the ancient Greek and Roman cultures. Meaning "rebirth," the French term "Renaissance" was described by the historian Jules Michelet as "the discovery of the world and of man" (Kerman 62). Patterned after the ancients, the Renaissance occurred along with the humanist movement. Focusing more on man than on God, the world became more secularized, and an age of reasoning as well as an intellectual awakening developed. Many prominent historical figures are associated with the Renaissance, in the world of exploration as well as in science and the arts. Among these, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Ponce de León were the most influential discoverers of the new world. With Italy being the center of the Renaissance period, Italian artists Donatello (ca. 1386-1466), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Raphael (1483-1520), and Michelangelo (1475-1564) are most well known. Painters became interested in perspective, as well as in individual portraits and realism. It was during this era that Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and Leonardo da Vinci the *Mona Lisa*. Contributions of the philosopher Erasmus (ca. 1466-1564) and scientist Galileo (1564-1642) also belong to this epoch. In addition, religious activist Martin Luther (1483-1546) founded the Protestant church. In literature, English playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616) made lasting contributions. One innovative creation directly affecting music was the printing press and movable type by Johannes Gutenberg (1395-1468). Ottaviano Petrucci (1466-1539) of Venice published the first music printed in movable type. Because of printing, music became more accessible and allowed for increased availability to the middle class. ~ <http://www.fasindy.org/Education/Renaissance.html> (Accessed on September 25, 2011)

of the world towards fresher perspectives, industrialization and innovation was at its peak, the exploration of science was moving out from the bonds of the Church¹¹ and thinking was becoming more secularized. This scheme is known as the “**Mastery of Nature**,” which is directed towards the elimination of pain and discomfort in human life...and eventually the exclusion of death from the system of phenomenon. By reducing the perspective of nature, including humanity, into the language of mathematics and the realm of machines, everything became more predictable and less complicated – easier to be manipulated and conquered.

In other words, the new scientific view of nature is mechanical, because it is an easy target for manipulation and predictability – demystifying it from the barrage of enigmas enveloping it. “She seems to be the world of quantity, as against the world of quality: of objects as against consciousness: of bound, as against the wholly or partially autonomous: of that which knows no values as against that which both has and perceives values: of efficient causes as against final causes.”¹²

Under this panorama, the whole universe is but one big machine and everything in it are mere screws and bolts. Hence, in the ordeal of thoroughly dominating nature, man himself becomes the prisoner to but one mechanical world – we become the screws. Humanity is being reduced into an appendage of this gigantic machine. We fall into a trance of total reliance to technology; we become less of who we are (as rational beings) and more of what the dictates of this grand project commands, sinking towards passivity rather than enhancing our reasoning prowess.

This is rather ironic because technology is a product of man’s intellectual dexterity. But as the tenacity to master nature takes the face of greed, this blueprint fell into a harsh self-destruction. Every time he achieves progress through science, he also becomes a target of this new discovery. Indeed technology and mechanization may have augmented productivity enormously and multiplied the complacency in our homes, but they have also increased humanity’s subordination to the technological apparatus of production and solace and to those who control the technology.

As it was explained by C.S. Lewis, this project of man to conquest nature has been itself a project to submit humanity to the sting of manipulation. In this scheme, it is not only nature being put to the scope of control but also human nature; and in this stage

¹¹ According to Modern philosophers, it is impossible for us to know things in themselves. Simply put, we are limited to their appearances, to their opacity and to their outward manifestations; beyond which we are but incapable of knowing. This goes against the tide of the Medieval thinkers whose metaphysics endeavored to study *being* in themselves, i.e. things in themselves. Accordingly, our mind is able enough to understand things beyond mere appearances; man can grasp the essences of things.

¹² C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (New York: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1965), 20.

of conquest, the conditioner is likewise being reduced towards the conditioned. Man is reduced to a matter to be used. In order to master nature one must first reduce nature to the empirical and quantifiable. This allows it to be manipulated. Hence man himself is reduced into nothing more than a utilitarian commodity. This in turn results into slavery and tyranny, since it will always be the few creatures atop this project who will exercise power over those below them or the generations after them.

Karl Marx went further into saying that in this technological society, human beings have lost their humanity; that through industrialization and mechanization, modern technology have created an inhuman social environment – an alien, impersonal world. This is his notion of *alienation*.¹³ According to Marx, technology has and is continuously being a key player in the work process and in the furtherance of capitalism. For him, technology serves in the interest of the capitalist in the maximization of profits, because, as aforementioned, the rise of the machines brought about augmentation in productivity and efficiency. However, along this process of growth is the further degradation of the laborer – he is further dehumanized and alienated. In other words, workers have been reduced into a mere adjunct of the machine. And in the larger

¹³ In his essays and manuscripts of 1843 and 1844, the young Marx uses the terms *Entfremdung* ('alienation' or 'estrangement') and *Entäusserung* ('externalization' or 'alienation') to refer to a great many things. Apparently, the point of this usage is to indicate a close connection in reality between the various things to which the terms are applied. The challenge is to discover what this connection is, and in what way the notion of alienation serves to represent it. The terms *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung* themselves evoke images: they suggest the separation of things which naturally belong together, or the establishment of some relation of indifference or hostility between things which are properly in harmony. On the most obvious level, Marx's use of them expresses the idea that the phenomena he describes are characterized by abnormalities or dysfunctions which follow these general patterns. Moreover, we can see this quite clearly in some of the things to which Marx applies the concept of alienation. Workers are said to be deprived of, and hence 'alienated' (separated) from their products; they stand in an 'alien' (hostile) relation to the environment in which they work, and they experience the labor they perform as 'alien' to them (indifferent or inimical to their natural human desires and aspirations). The division of labor is 'alienating' in that it separates people into rigid categories, and sets human activities in an 'alien' relation to each other by developing the ones needed for each specialization to the detriment of each person's individuality and integral humanity.² The economic system, as Marx depicts it, further separates or 'alienates' people from one another, by making them indifferent to the needs of others, and pitting the interests of each against those of everyone else.³ Further, Marx tells us, in the modern state the individual's conscious participation in society as 'citizen' is separated from everyday life, experienced as an alien or false identity to be assumed at odd intervals for ritual purposes. The political state itself is 'alienated' from the realm of material production and exchange in which people sustain their actual common life. And following Feuerbach, Marx views the prevailing Christian religion as separating everything valuable and worthwhile from humanity and nature, positing it (in imagination) in an alien being outside the world. (Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*, New York: Routledge, 2004, 45-46.)

scale of things, maybe it's not just the workers who are reduced into such quagmire – everyone is sipped deep as well into this quicksand.

Herbert Marcuse¹⁴, a product of the Frankfurt School which was greatly influenced by Marxism, also said that industrialization have served drastically in increasing man's subservience to the technological and mechanical apparatus of production – and eventually to those who control the machines. One's identity and self-worth is determined by his role, and his efficiency thereto, in the system of production and technological advances. At the end of the day, man's rationality is even pulled down into the level of mere technicality – and the only significant questions are those concerned with maximizing efficiency. Therefore, an escalating degree of conquest is taking place – man over nature, man over man, man over himself, nations over nations, and eventually, one generation lording over the next ones.

In a nutshell, in man's every attempt to master nature and hence achieve human progress, he always ends up conquering other men with the aid of nature in the process. Every power man gains is at the same time a power over himself.

“Each new power won by man is a power over man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car.” Let us consider three typical examples: the aeroplane, the wireless, and the contraceptive. In a civilized community, in peace-time, anyone who can pay for them may use these things. But it cannot strictly be said that when he does so he is exercising his own proper or individual power over Nature. If I pay you to carry me, I am not therefore myself a strong man. Any or all of the three things I have mentioned can be withheld from some men by other men--by those who sell, or those who allow the sale, or those who own the sources of production, or those who make the goods.

What we call Man's power is, in reality, a power possessed by some men which they may, or may not, allow other men to profit by. Again, as regards the powers manifested in the aeroplane or the wireless, Man is as much the patient or subject as the possessor, since he is the target both for bombs and for propaganda. And as regards contraceptives, there is a paradoxical, negative sense in which all possible future generations are the patients or subjects of a power wielded by those already alive. By contraception simply, they are denied existence; by contraception used as a means of selective breeding, they are, without their concurring voice, made to be what one generation, for its own reasons, may choose to prefer. From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.¹⁵

¹⁴ One-Dimensional Man, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1964.

¹⁵ Lewis, The Abolition of Man, 17.

I may sound a bit callous here, but slowly humanity is being *dehumanized* by this panorama. Man is turning into a cyborg, a hybrid of machine and organism. While it's true that this blueprint has been the reverie of a sundry of sci-fi motion pictures – manifestos of super-humans with super-strengths, what is becoming more apparent in our present society is not the dream for a parade of Marvel-superhero clones; it is, rather, the creation of cyborgs whose existences rely largely upon mechanical codes and ciphers.

The Abolition of Man

But the panorama doesn't stop there; the anxiety for perfection rages on and the mastery of nature lingers en route the horizon of forever. Not only is this project slowly stripping us of our identities, but it is also fast reducing into rubbles the place we call home. Family is little by little being pushed aside to place atop one's addiction to gadgets and high-tech thingamabobs. And of course, global warming is also a major offspring of this silent assault. Amused by the beauty and allurements that technology offers through the media-snare trap, our environment swallowed all our negligence and nature is now hammering its payback amidst us. And advocacies for the renewal and revitalization of the Earth sound to me misanthropic rather than sympathetic; we still cannot do without our technologies, right? In fact, we are over-using it even more at the expense of our "beloved" nature.

The idea of a great "eye" lording over all of human activities has been more prominent with the development newer and more sophisticated apparatuses. There are new communications and computer technologies which, though seemingly harmless and gearing towards furthering the development of interpersonal realms, have only opened novel possibilities and more effective means for keeping watch over human beings.

Escalating the masterpiece to its zenith, with the aid of the newest innovations in technology vis-à-vis science, control and manipulation of the most fundamental of human processes is no longer a mere fantasy – it is now a reality. Genetic engineering, stem cell and human cloning are fast wielding the scepter, and the trance for a threshold of super-humans is swiftly entering the theatre. Wouldn't it be wonderful that one day, "gene-banks" will be raised from the ground wherein one may take a glimpse at his own genetic build-up? In case of a malfunction in one of them, a single click of button will do the trick and the faulty gene

shall be swapped with a shiny new one. Or how about the magic of being able to determine the gender of a yet-to-be-born child and even enhance his/her capacities to the fullest – an instant child prodigy!

Of course, I am not trying to take away from those advocating these technologies of their novel sympathy of bringing into scenario remedies for diseases and other ailments, which are up to this date, incurable; using these new knowledge of the human genome in the pursuit of medicine's traditional goals of preventing illness and disability from occurring, curing illness and reversing disability, relieving the symptoms of ill-health, and the likes. However, a vast range of other intentions has emerged in the scenery: satisfying desires for better children, superior performance, ageless bodies and transformation of melancholic temperament into a happy soul. At first, they appear harmless; but digging deeper into the scenario one will see the predicament these technologies offer.

These issues are rather more complicated and it ought to take a separate article for its discussion. But for now, let me just utter simple reflections concerning this phenomenon. We are, in this game, *trying to play god*¹⁶. We fail, or refuse, to accept the limitations. We are endeavoring to be gods ourselves, able to determine and create children of our own prejudices and inclinations, attain superior performance (not through the natural ways), engineer large increases in the maximum lifespan...in short, we want to be perfect – *super-humans*. Humanity is fashioning for itself a domain where there is no place for the weak and only the mighty ones subsist. The old adage *survival of the fittest* is taking a new turn – this time more destructive and ravaging. Ultimately, science and technology has offered anew a question which has always been lingering in thin air – why recourse to an incomprehensible divine entity if we ourselves can be gods?

¹⁶ One of more popular manifestations of this is the *Human Genome Project*, where the place of a god in the sphere of life is slowly being reduced into rubbles. The ability to characterize the genetic bases for multi-factorial diseases like cancer, is not within reach. Diagnosis of a number of inherited diseases before they even develop symptoms is already possible. The rapid progress of human genome analysis will lead to substantial improvements in the detection of genetic disorders. These advances in the field of health care illustrate only one of the many ways in which modern technology could be used to enhance man's creative potential. Many other power are already, or nearly within the reach of the human being. But power begets more power. Power – as well as the modern technology that makes it possible – have a way of generating their own excuse for being. Having been created, they appear to develop an appetite for creation. Unfortunately, they can get to be too big even for their own creator. Developments in genetic research are showing how powerful man has become and how the idea of re-inventing himself, and even God, becomes a necessity along the process. (Leonardo de Castro, *Reinventing Creation, Re-inventing the Creator*, (Sophia: Volume XXVI, 1996-97) 2-3

Along this craze of technological supremacy are the looming culture of apathy and moral indifference – vanishing deep into an abyss of “emotionlessness”, just like a machine. When there’s nothing left to conquer, man finds himself in the crossroads of abolishing everything else which would hinder him from staying atop of everything else. And by everything else, it means even the most fundamental of principles. And since, in doing so, man also lords over traditions and norms, the “ego” becomes the new parameter of things; duty is no longer the *oughtness* but merely actions in conformity with what is convenient. In other words, morality is no longer a question of the “what is right and wrong” but of “what I want” – an autonomous morality.

In other words, by not subjecting themselves to traditions and law, as stated above, we create for ourselves an autonomous morality – a world of our own. And autonomous morality, espousing absolute self-will leads to *ethical void*, which ironically reduces the subject doer to passive object. As we step out of our human nature and of all the rational and moral motives that run alongside the former, we step into a void, an empty world of irony wherein the conqueror eventually becomes the conquered.

And since we are no longer within the framework of human nature, we ourselves become the subject of our own conquest. Man reduces himself and others into something lesser than their humanity – a material to be used. Man is reduced into a thing to be manipulated and hence is no longer man, but an “artifact” just like all the other commodities that resulted from his fancy dream. Thus, the abolition of man – of humanity.

We are more than mere screws

Please don’t think that I am here proposing a deconstruction of this technological society. What I am simply trying to drive home is that we are more than mere machines; we are human persons. Indeed, technology has become a great ally to us; but never should it conquer our humanity and hypnotize us towards a slumber in its ghetto. Use it for the welfare of the vaster community, but never be caught within its claws and be its prey. So what makes us “more” then?

The problem with modern science and technology today is that it always wants to “see through” everything; meaning to say, it always wants to give an explanation to everything – to subject everything in its formulae and logic and reduce all into nothing but a mere

machine. Unfortunately, reason alone would not suffice. We cannot go on explaining every single countenance of things. We need something to become our foundation. There must be an arbiter to check on this scrutiny. It is no use trying to 'see through' first principles, for in so doing, we would end up seeing nothing at all.

The reverie of being a cyber-empowered mutants is a childhood dream and that ought to remain as that! Pursuing to be better is one thing; excessive discontentment is another. As above-discussed, the one who is trying to conquer nature is the one who is being conquered. We are the final victims of this project! And so in order to avoid from falling into a deep slumber of apathy and ethical void amidst this project of conquering nature, we have to realize that "reason", while essential to human existence, is not everything; that there are always shades of gray that is beyond the grasp of science and of the mind.

We are not some useless screw in one big machine – we are *human beings*. We are human beings who are constantly in participation to the world. Merleau-Ponty thoroughly explored this dialectic relationship between man and the world through his notion of embodiment. According to him, neither the world nor man can find meaning and worth apart from each other and caged in solitude. The world is not ready-made, but is nonetheless, an inalienable presence; left on its own, it will stay as an ambiguous domain of blank sheets. As an embodied consciousness, I choose and organize about me the setting or domain I would want to reside in and venture through; but I can never escape the world. "True consciousness is parallel to the world...our unity (though) is never guaranteed though... (Hence) we maintain some modicum of human integrity only at the cost of constant struggle and re-interpretation."¹⁷ The world has something to say and simultaneous to its voice is the body-subject giving meaning to the world. It is a constant dialogue towards meaning and value. The body is a possibility of a meaning-giving activity while the world is a realm pregnant with form. "We are relation to the world through and through"¹⁸ ...I am present to myself by being present to the world.¹⁹

The perceiving subject is not (an) absolute thinker; rather, it functions according to a natal pact between our body and the world, between ourselves and our body. Given a perpetually new

¹⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden Fisher, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.), xvi. This quotation was taken from the foreword.

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), viii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 466.

natural and historical situation to control, the perceiving subject undergoes a continued birth; at each instant it is something new. Every incarnate subject is like an open notebook in which we do not yet know what will be written.²⁰ This dialectic relationship between man and the world gives rise to the dual notion of transcendence – that while man is a participant within the constantly changing panoramas of the world, he is, nevertheless capable of transcending beyond the world; and in the same manner, the world to man will always be a constant transcendence and mystery.

Therefore, the danger of technology will arise only if we fail to see the authentic relationship that we should be establishing with it. We need not abandon technology; we only have to understand that the pursuit and realization of human needs, interests, and eventually, purpose and worth, requires more than mere technological progress and a technically efficient society. We have to transcend the temptation, or the subconscious submission of equating human need and worth with technology. According to Habermas²¹, the problem is not really with science and technology per se; it is rather in the ill-chosen and misplaced extension of technological practices to the interpersonal realm of discourse and communication. When this happens, we are not only endangering our personal worth, but that of the interpersonal realm as well. Social questions are being reduced into mere technical queries, that only the expert administrator (those who controls technology and its advances) can solve – hence, fielding the perfect horizon for justifying the concentration of social power within the grasp of the technocrats/bureaucrats’ control.

But again, as above-discussed, this should not be the case. We are more than technical goofs. We think, we feel, we sympathize. Man is rational, and this rationality cannot be reduced to mere instrumental efficiency and can therefore be used to set non-arbitrary goals and limits to technical development.

The “other” is more than mere appendage...

Finally, as pointed out by above, part of the danger of technology and hunger for total dominance and supremacy, as discussed above,

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text*, trans. Arleen B. Dallery, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (USA: Northwest University Press, 1964), 6.

²¹ Habermas, Jürgen, *Technology and Science as ‘Ideology, In Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1970.

is the reduction of the *other* into mere object. This, however, is a huge misconception. Because fundamentally, inasmuch as I see, I am also visible; I perceive, I am also subject to perception. Hence, the vantage point I am taking is not to the exclusion of all others; we are both primordially open to an “other” and also a spectacle for the other. I do not just *need* others – I am *one* with them. We are all subjects, and hence we ought not to treat each other as objects.

There is an innate alterity in the self – my self-awareness is a presentiment to the other. The other is a mirror to myself and vice versa. This leads us towards the realization that I am not alone in this world and it is never my own private suite – I am, from the very beginning, a social being. And insofar as both of us are phenomena in this world, we too are abodes to immanence and transcendence. Never should I enclose the other within the peripheries of my fantasies and juxtapositions for there is always something about the other that escapes my gaze; for, in the end, I too am a mystery to myself and sometimes, I really need the perspective of others in order to demystify this hidden *me*. Thus beyond any utilitarian need for one another, our relationship is already always dialectical. We ought to accept the other’s otherness and be open to the sparks of invisibility in other’s visibility. Hence, we ought to be sensitive of the other. The other should not be reduced into a sheer thing or mere object of manipulation – the other too has a dignified life that each ought to uphold. Thus, human relations transcend presence but it can never be achieved or accomplished without presence. Our inherence in this world binds us together towards a common quest for meaning.

And since the world we live in is never a private realm but is rather shared by all, we ought to be open that one’s perspective is never the entirety of reality. I see something you do not see and vice versa. Or even when two persons are gazing at the same mountain, the way each other sees the mountain will stay different. But it is precisely these distinct points of view that make human relations more meaningful – for there is always something to share. Indeed, meaningful relations do not rest with ontic commonalities, of empty traces, of myopic simulations; if there is something that must be shared by two individuals, that should definitely be their respective quest for meaning. We are all called towards a dialectic relationship with each other; an active communion mediated by language, culture, freedom and a single horizon towards the weaving of one single history.

We are always in participation to the world, both cultural and natural. Hence, our relationship with others is an enjoinder and an involvement; a communion with otherness. So much so that despite each other's differences and uniqueness, an authentic human relation is always a possibility – only if we are going to realize our true and primordial directedness towards others. I would say that we have indeed lost that childlike innocence, that puerile openness for the voices and silhouettes of others, that infantile readiness of playing games with others. Our primordial sociability has indeed been swathed by our prejudices and biases and narcissistic stances; by our hunger for supremacy and power - but it is never lost. We only have to rediscover it, relive it and re-establish not only our place in this world, but especially our relationship with others.

Freedom too plays a major role in this merge, for it is always through a free and uncoerced choice that we can say that my deed was not simply an indifferent act – it is either good or bad. My relationship with another would only be meaningful if I did it out of my free will. It is this freedom to converge into a communion that makes our pre-reflective sociability a genuine reciprocity. "Our commitments are never completely unsupported since our freedom is always interwoven with that of other people; and that the carnality and fundamental ambiguity of our being-in-the-world are by no means impediments to reflection or to communication with others"²²

But this freedom is never absolute for although we are not fully determined by our past, temperament, or situation, we are nevertheless not radically free to these motivations. Man's freedom is found in accepting them and taking them up in free choices, in which one favored motivation is declined only by assuming another. And which can only gradually alter the basic direction of personality. Sure we can avoid communicating with other people, but we can never escape being in a particular situation; we cannot escape the world – both the cultural and the phenomenal.

To be born is both to be born of the world and to be born into the world. The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities...I am never a thing and never bare consciousness. In fact, even our own pieces of initiative, even the situations which we have chosen, bear us on, once they have been entered upon by virtue of a state rather than an act.²³

²² Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), 151-152.

²³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 453.

Thus, we are always in a form of commitment and this is what gives meaning to our freedom, to our existence. For it is when we commit ourselves that we gain a better picture of who we really are and will become. Commitments shape the person and his history – an anchorage which is always outside himself. We are thus always committed, but never absolutely. It is a movement beyond the self towards the other, a self-alienation towards the social world. Hence, we ought to be aware that since we live in a single world and constitute a single history, choices matter a lot. Merleau-Ponty beautifully pulled down the curtains of his book *Phenomenology of Perception* with this panorama:

*Your son is caught in fire: you are the one who will save him... if there is an obstacle, you would be ready to give your shoulder provided only that you can charge down that obstacle . your abode is your act itself. Your act is you... You give yourself in exchange... Your significance shows itself, effulgent. It is your duty, your hatred, your love, your steadfastness, your ingenuity... Man is but a network of relationships, and these alone matter to him.*²⁴

We are made of the same flesh and our worlds are intertwined. Our perspective blends into a shared common world and an intersubjective system forms between body-subjects, which is unbroken by reflective objectification, and which is irreducible to either party but which calls forth the action of each. Human relation and intersubjectivity is thus, in the end, lived and experienced. It is a constant participation to the greater scheme formality – a commitment. For in the end, empathy and intersubjectivity is not something which we put to mere words in sermons and in novels of various sorts; it is something done, something that is lived.

Finally, true enough, technology is an expression of man's creativity and curiosity, an embodiment of his desire for a better life, a manifestation of the grandeur of being human – but inasmuch as it has been and always will be a constant companion to man's earthly journey, we also have to master the art of humbly accepting the limits of the mind and courageously embracing the task of containing these innovative leaps into tools of uplifting human spirit and the interpersonal facet of society. Technology should be a means towards achieving this end, rather than barrier that would further deteriorate each one's sense of the "other" as another "I". We are more than mere machine; we are not cyborgs – we are human. We are not just born and thereafter, survive – we exist; we live.

²⁴ Ibid., 456.

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