

The Metaphysical as Ecological

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Abstract

The paper "The Metaphysical as Ecological" present a kind of Reflexive Metaphysics. It deals with the possibility that the metaphysical could be viewed as ecological. It addresses a controversy that sees metaphysics or philosophy as one of the many causes of ecological crisis. It therefore shows that in the context of Reflexive Metaphysics the metaphysical integrates with the ecological.

Keywords: Reflexive metaphysics; Metaphysical; Ecological

Introduction

In what sense reflexive metaphysics shows that the Metaphysical is viewed as Ecological? This paper deals with three possibilities that what is metaphysical could also be understood as ecological. With the hope of a unique contribution in the vast discussions on Metaphysics among philosophical circles, we would like to follow a different path. We will not be tracing this possibility from the traditional point of view that - Metaphysics has Cosmology as one of its branches. Using the insights of Reflexive Metaphysics, that reflecting upon the self is never isolated to others and world and that the reflection of the truth, good, one and beautiful should always go back to include the self, others and the world, in a more or less similar sense, or at least inspired in this sense, this is the path Martin Heidegger and metaphysicians after him have trod: that there is integration of the ecological and the metaphysical in the human person, that the human existence is an openness to the world and others, and that the human person, as a world-builder, is responsible to the world.

Furthermore, in this paper, we would like also to highlight some thoughts supportive of the claim of the said paper by Fr. John P. Zwaenepoel, a CICM priest who served in Saint Louis University and San Carlos Major Seminary, regarding this topic.

Discussion of the Key Concepts

In this section, there are four points to be discussed. It asks questions about the ecological, metaphysical, the meaning of existence, and the nature of the human person.

Ecology and ecological

What is ecology? Ecology is the science that studies the living things, the environment, and their interactions [1]. It comes from the Greek words *oikos* (house or home) and *logos* (study). It is *the study of the house or home*. As the study of the home, it is the study of ecosystems. Ecosystems refer to the web or network of relations among organisms at different scales of organization [1].

This term is very much mentioned nowadays in ethics and politics. But more than these, the term contains other big terms significant to the topic on hand. It contains world or earth, all living things (including non-living things contained in the earth), interaction among these things, tensions and attempts to manage conflicts, harmony, and movements towards responsibility [1].

What is 'ecological'? The term 'ecological' describes environmental integration, environmental interactions (conflicts or tensions), environmental management, environmental care (both for human

beings and non-human beings), and harmonization of living things and all creatures of this world [1]. For example, 'The members of DENR are doing something ecological in the forest.' This means the members of DENR are planting trees, caring for the trees, plants and forest, watering the plants and trees, and studying how the forest would be protected by looking into how these trees, plants, animals and people could live harmoniously.

John Zwaenepoel's concept of the metaphysical and other philosophical views

How is the metaphysical be viewed? In this section, there is a brief discussion on the views of John Zwaenepoel, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, William Desmond, and Jean Luc Marion.

The metaphysical according to Zwaenepoel: The human person, by nature, is integral. He or she seeks, in his or her quest for authenticity, for integration. According to John Zwaenepoel in his *Phenomenological Psychology* in 1963, the human person integrates himself or herself into the biological world and the social world, without being absorbed by such [1]. He or she also integrates himself or herself into the metaphysical [2].

In order to realize himself/herself, the human person has to open up to two realities, namely: (1) to the whole of reality and (2) to the Absolute, who is the foundation of all reality. According to Zwaenepoel, this opening up is likened to a 'vocation'. Zwaenepoel used 'vocation' to describe this phenomenon, a term of Gabriel Marcel. The term 'vocation' is Marcel's expression of the metaphysical experience [3]. In other words, without denying, the human person is but 'naturally' exposed to reality (the world, the society, the environment, all that is in it and all activities attached to it) and the Absolute (God, faith, and religion).

By embracing these, he or she makes himself or herself available and 'of service' to the Absolute, makes himself or herself authentic, and the realities (the world, the society, environment, etc.) shine.

The metaphysical according to Aquinas: Metaphysics, for Saint

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Thomas Aquinas, is a reflection on experiences. These experiences include the tensions or conflicts of the human and divine dimensions of the human person, the tensions between the theoretical and practical, or reason and faith. It examines peoples' thinking, questioning, and living. With all these, it attempts to come up with a synthesis which contains knowledge of God [4].

Although Aquinas' aim is the knowledge of God, there are some points that can be picked up supportive of the thought that the metaphysical can be seen as ecological. How is this so or in what particular case?

The human person has to accept these realities as 'givens' in one's life. These may be in harmony with one another sometimes. And these may also be in conflicts or in tensions sometimes. But one has to look at these tensions as 'callings' for opportunities for transcendence and thinking. In other words, it is a time to make decisions for authenticity and perfection.

According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, the human person is an integration of the human and the divine dimensions [5]. In the integration, there is tension, and this is always geared towards the search for meanings, the search for answers, the search for what makes people better people, an opportunity for thinking to meet and respond to changes in life, an attempt to look for balance and happiness in life, and others. Hence, it is an opportunity for to be more and better human (authenticity).

With this thought, Aquinas does not reject conflicts for these conflicts become the threshold of meanings, happiness and authenticity.

The metaphysical according to Augustine: For Saint Augustine of Hippo, Metaphysics is the search for meaning as the sense of the whole. It does not isolate. It takes the whole. It is geared also to the Absolute but passing through the truth, good, and the beautiful. It is a process of witnessing to truth in freedom.

How is this so? It is looking at it as an invitation to personal clarity. It is the acknowledgement of the presence of the infinite and one's own finitude. As Augustine would say, "you have made me for yourself, Lord, and my heart is restless until it rests in you." It is an introspection or examination of oneself, a look into the interplay between *eros* and *logos* [6].

Eros and *logos* is the whole person. There is also tension between these two constitutive elements of the human person. But when balanced and harmonized, the *Eros* becomes the desire to produce something worthwhile (by thinking). This is the desire also to be with God, a journey going back to the original state of existence [7].

On the other hand, *Logos* is an exercise of metaphysical thinking. It is aiming at a unified vision of reality because it sees everything that exists must have a reason for existence.

Although Augustine's metaphysics, like Aquinas', aims also at a grasp of the presence of God, it does not reject the concept of the ecological. Augustine's Metaphysics does not reject the point that people has the desire to think and to do what is worthwhile for the person, the community and the environment, and it does not also reject the point that there is the drive for transcendence, a moving towards the acceptance, welcoming and embracing of God, others and the world.

The human person's existence as openness to others and the world

Zwaenepoel's concept of existence: In history, the human person

was seen as self-enclosed and self-sufficient subjectivity [8]. There was more emphasis on knowing the self and the world, rather than understanding the necessity and being-able-to do something for others and the world. This is not the case however when one has a good understanding of the term 'existence'. What is existence?

Existence refers to what is specific to the human person as human person. The human person is characterized by existence by which he or she is distinguished from all other beings that inhabit the universe. What is its unique character? Such is to be understood in its literal sense - that the term comes from *ex* (out) and *stare* (to stand). The human person is therefore a being who stands out of himself (or herself). He or she is a being with an ecstatic nature, for he or she goes out of himself or herself by relating with the objects in the world [9].

According to Zwaenepoel, the human person is not simply a thing among other things, nor a pure interiority turned inward upon itself, shut up in its own immanent representations [10]. The human person realizes himself or herself as an interiority with consciousness and freedom only by going outside himself or herself. He or she sees as his or her responsibility to get near to things by way of a contact with the world and with other people. The human person's consciousness or thinking is essentially and from the very beginning an openness towards what is other than itself. Hence, in his or her reflection upon his or her very being or very existence, he sees the need to be in harmony with others and to be in harmony with the world.

Merleau-ponty, Sartre, and Heidegger on existence: In summary and a way of showing the metaphysical as ecological, Merleau-Ponty said the human person is open as a "subject bound to the world" [11]. The human person is never conceived in isolation or separation from the world and the world is also never conceived without the human person [12]. Hence, for Merleau-Ponty, the human person is always of service to the world and vice versa.

Sartre, in his *magnum opus*, also said this is a 'summoning of being' [13]. The human person is made open to be aware of being called. The human person is being called to be with the world and others. It is in being with the world and others that he or she experiences his or her best [14].

And for Heidegger, the human person as being-in-the-world (most especially that part - *being-in*) expresses a relationship of being actively concerned with the objects in the world, like: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something or looking after it, and etc. [15]. The human person cares about others and about the world. He or she strives to be in a harmonious relationship with others and the world.

Desmond's metaphysics: The openness that has been being developed in the previous paragraphs tells a Metaphysics of relationships or dialogue. Human existence as open to the world and others is an existence open to relations and dialogue. This is best explained by William Desmond [16].

For Desmond, Being is experienced by the quality of people's relationships. Things are understood always in relation to being. Including life and the human person, Being is at its best always in relation and in communion with others.

Also in Desmond, human existence or simply being is dialogical. The human person is always in communication or in dialogue with others and the world. Communication or dialogue bridges people to other people, people to the world. Hence, there comes a threshold to participation, cooperation, unity, communion, transformation and change.

Marion's idea of openness: This paper picks up Jean Luc Marion's concept of openness. Openness, for him, is an attitude of the human person. Because of the fact that people cannot grasp everything and that there is always something beyond or more, his or her attitude is to remain open. He calls it *agape* or love. For a revelation, one has to be open to what can happen, what will appear, and what will be.

The human person as a world-builder

Albert Dondeyne, in his work in 1963, spoke about the human person and the human world relationship. He said *"I am influenced by the world in which I dwell and I influence this world; I dwell, inhabit, sojourn and others in the world; I cultivate, transform, humanize, and personalize the world by my simple human presence"* [17].

These words of Dondeyne point to the possibility of the metaphysical to be viewed as ecological. The human person relates to the world, and the world relating to the human person. There is interaction and harmony between the two [18].

In a more or less similar thought, Gabriel Marcel considers the primitive relation between the self and the world to be one of exchange, involvement, and participation. This is either by taking part in and of being a part of that in which one takes part. Furthermore, Marcel spoke of a world as *"my world, a world in which I feel at home"* [19].

Marcel underlines the value of participation, involvement, and exchange. All these ideas make one feel at home. Because of the rejuvenating power of always being 'at home', one comes home, one participates in clean-ups, one leads movements to eradicate all elements that would destroy 'home'.

Heidegger spoke of being as someone who realizes itself in the world, associates the world with its project and sees the world in the light of these projects [20]. The human person is a world-builder. He or she arranges the world around him or her. With these thoughts, it is possible to speak of the farmer, the world of the teachers, the world of drivers, and others. These different worlds are so many different ways of arranging the world in general.

Summary of Arguments

In this section, there are three arguments being pointed out in this paper.

Argument 1: on integration

The human person is never an isolated entity or a self-sufficient subjectivity. He or she is always open to relationships, communion, communications and dialogues to others and to the world. He or she looks for the others and world for it is where he or she shines. With a state like this, it is possible to think of metaphysical as ecological. The human person embraces all, accepts every opposing view and integrates himself or herself to the biological, political, cultural and social. In a very special way, the human person has a vocation or calling to the metaphysical. It is this metaphysical dimension in the human person that necessitates the acceptance and integration of all realities and including the absolute, the basis of all realities. This acceptance and integration includes of course the ecological. With this condition of human existence, it is but natural for the human person to be a being-in-the-world, a being-with-others, a being of service to the world and others, a being completing himself or herself in relationship and communion with others and the world.

Argument 2: On openness

The human person is not a self-enclosed subjectivity. He or she is a

conscious being. He or she opens himself or herself up to others and to the world in thinking, questioning, and even in living. The idea of the ecological as harmony and community points to a basic attitude and that is openness.

Openness is not something passive. It is active, it is intending, it is alertness to what will appear, to what will come, and to what will be. It is therefore the hope needed by others and the world of today.

This openness is also a welcoming of differences and conflicts. It is not rejecting them or running away from problems. It is not even continuing the view that the world as material is worldly or bad, that oppositions and conflicts are not good. It is seeing in conflicts opportunities to thinking and creativity for a better life and for a better world. It is an openness therefore that gives space for people to maximize the talents, skills, intelligence and gifts to make this world a better place to live in.

Furthermore, as a way of showing this openness, Merleau-Ponty said the human person is a "subject bound to the world". Sartre, in his magnum opus, also said this is a 'summoning of being'. And for Heidegger, that the human person as being-in-the-world (most especially that part - being-in-) expresses a relationship of being actively concerned with the objects in the world, like: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something or looking after it, and etc. The human person cares about others and about the world. He or she strives to be in a harmonious relationship with others and the world.

Argument 3: On care

A good context where the metaphysical is ecological is in the concept of care and responsibility. The human person likes to live ecologically, that is peacefully, well-managed home or community, dialogical individuals, and harmoniously existing with others and the world. Because this is what he or she envisions, this is what he or she will do.

The human person is a world-builder. He or she cares about the world. He or she considers the world (the ecological) as significant as himself or herself. For instance, Heidegger spoke of being as someone who realizes itself in the world, associates the world with its project and sees the world in the light of these projects. The human person is a world-builder. He or she arranges the world around him or her. With these thoughts, it is possible to speak of the farmer, the world of the teachers, the world of drivers, and others. These different worlds are so many different ways of arranging the world in general.

Conclusion

Here are some things we could conclude from this reflection on the metaphysical as ecological:

1. The metaphysical is never isolated from the ecological for the realities are always the starting point of every metaphysical reflection. There is always the embracing, including, and integration of the 'given'. The 'given' includes everything, but most especially the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the disabled, the widows, the children, the hopeless, the weak, the victims, the oppressed; and it also includes the abused, over used and misused world.
2. The human person's openness to the world is not a kind of waiting for something distant to come. It is an attitude of thinking, reflecting, and searching for meanings, meanings needed for the development of others and the world.

3. This openness is about hope. It gives a sense of hope, a positive attitude needed by the people and the world of today. It is being ready for what will appear and come.
4. This hope is possible only when the human person becomes responsible and starts caring for other people and the world.
5. Further reflection on this topic leads to discussions on faith and religion (openness to the Absolute) and their significances in human existence.

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