Globalization and Ethics for the Future

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── Abstract ──

This article approaches the notion of developing an ethics for the age of globalization. Developing such an ethics necessitates revisiting the premises of traditional ethics, which include three presuppositions: (1) Presentism, (2) Anthropocentrism, and (3) Individualism (voluntarism). The ethical subject is restricted to the agents and themes that appear in the present time and space, leading to the position of human being as a privileged actor in ethics as well as to Individualism (voluntarism). These traditional ethical paradigms were established at an epoch when the power of technology was relatively small, and in today's globalized world, these paradigms must be redefined. We need to extend the range of ethics according to the extension of the politico-market system and technology, taking into account all absent agents and factors. This new approach requires the expansion of the three ethical presuppositions: (1) from Presentism to Futurism, (2) from the restrictive consideration for humanity to a general consideration for all lives or all beings, and (3) from the individual subject to a collective subject in terms of responsibility. Above all, it is imperative to take into consideration the temporal dimension, the future generations of the world that are not yet present, and those generations that may even never be present. Such an ethics, which calculates the incalculable, has to leave open the possibility of becoming for the world, in the world, and the very possibility of the world. True "globalization" consists of such a "worldization," that is, the movement, formation, or becoming of the world to come. In order to allow this "wordlization" to fit into our ethical framework, we must also expand the concept of "globalization," redefining it as not simply a political, economic movement but a movement of "englobing" all beings and all lives, including future generations. Such an ethical globalization will be a globalization of hope.

Globalization and Ethics

It has been a long time since globalization first provoked violent changes in the diverse fields of politics, economy, society, and culture. This stream, principally derived from economic globalization (the expansion of a capitalist economy and the formation of a global market), has brought about a huge increase in the cross-border flows of peoples, goods, materials, and information by lowering many of the barriers between nations. Needless to say, we should not overlook in this context the role of the worldwide information network (that is, information and media globalization).

From a philosophical viewpoint, this sort of globalization in the market, transportation, information, etc., consists in a departure from the material, the physical, and the natural, such as land, ground, soil, territory, region, country, history, community, restricted society, traditional culture, race, blood, origin, etc. There is, thus, "deindustrialization" (a drift to post-secondary industry) and a structural shift to tertiary industries (the service industry) and the information industry in economically advanced countries, and at the same time, an "international division of labor" that imposes primary and secondary industries on "developing countries." In this new global regime, the relocation of material production to the "Third World" gives rise in advanced countries to the illusion of emancipation from material constraints, an illusion confirmed by advanced information technologies and the "media" (the media technology or media industry) that pervades our everyday life.

It goes without saying that this globalization necessitates a great change ("Reform," "Renovation") in political, economic, legal, and cultural systems, but this necessity also extends to the fields of philosophy

and thought. In particular, ethics needs to be reconsidered entirely in what is a genuinely convulsive situation that overturns the traditional ways of thinking and value systems. Ethics has a mission to think about such issues as good and evil and how to lead a good life in order to point us in the right direction. It is urgent that we reconstruct ethics, unless we want to throw it away as obsolete and ineffectual. However, all of the traditional and established ethical systems in human history have presuppositions that are absolutely incapable of coping with the new circumstances presented by globalization. This premise is what we could call Presentism. Without "deconstructing" this Presentism, there will be no possibility of reconstructing an ethics for the future.

Presentism

What does it mean to say that previous ethics have been molded out of Presentism? We refer here to a text of Hans Jonas. In his work *The Imperative of Responsibility*, he points out that traditional ethics has been based on "simultaneousness," "directness," and "reciprocality." In traditional ethics, "the range of human action and therefore responsibility was narrowly circumscribed."[1]

All enjoinders and maxims of traditional ethics, materially different as they may be, show this confinement to the immediate setting of the action. "Love thy neighbor as thyself"; "Do unto others as you would wish them to do unto you"; "Instruct your child in the way of truth"; "Strive for excellence by developing and actualizing the best potentialities of your being qua man"; "Subordinate your individual good to the common good"; "Never treat your fellow man as a means only but always also as an end in himself"—and so on. Note that in all these maxims the agent and the "other" of his action are sharers of a common present. It is those who are alive now and in some relationship with me who have a claim on my conduct as it affects them by deed or omission. The ethical universe is composed of contemporaries, and its horizon to the future is confined by the foreseeable span of their lives. Similarly confined is its horizon of place, within which the agent and the other meet as neighbor, friend, or foe, as superior and subordinate, weaker and

stronger, and in all the other roles in which humans interact with one another. To this proximate range of action all morality was geared.[2]

It means that previous ethics have been focused only on presence in the spatio-temporal sense of the word. Traditional ethics is restricted to subjects as well as objects in the range of presence, modeled after a face-to-face and contemporary relationship: this is an ethics for and among present beings who exist in the here and now, whether this being is subject or object. In short, this is an ethics of what is countable, an ethics of countability. Of course, it is natural that we should look after or respect those beings who are present before us as ethical subjects, or within the reach of our actions and influences. This is an important ethical truth as valid today as ever. However, the conditions of globalization, with its advanced technologies, demolish this premise of the ethics of presence. The global market and its transport and information networks reduce distances, removing peoples and products from their native places and origins in order to circulate goods, materials, resources, knowledge, ideas, and information. Hence the juxtaposition and mixture of foreign objects/subjects. In a world that is connected by highly developed transport and information systems, all heterogeneous, distant, absent beings have the potential to become neighbors, a part of the "global village" constructed by this ubiquitous network. Thus, it becomes possible for one individual's small actions to have a significant effect for someone else living on the other side of the globe. This has environmental consequences, for it also means that industrial activities can have a tremendous effect far beyond their immediate location.

The generation of electricity by nuclear power is an obvious example. If a severe nuclear accident, like those of Chernobyl and Fukushima, occurs in China, it will cause widespread damage to neighboring countries, particularly those to the east, including Japan and Korea. What is more, it will have serious aftereffects on the environment for generations to come. Even if there is no accident, a nuclear power plant cannot generate energy without radioactive waste, which means future generations pay for our prosperity. Nuclear energy policy thus confronts us with an ethical question beyond our immediate time and space—does the present generation have the right to live in

prosperity at the cost of others to come, who are absent here and now? J.-P. Sartre said that the advent of nuclear weapons made humanity into an entity that shared a common destiny. In order to face the problem of nuclear power, we are required to expand the concept of ethics and responsibility to an extent that previous ethical systems did not have to consider: an ethics of responsibility for our species, humanity, and for the entire environment, for the world itself.

Presentism, Anthropocentrism, Individualism

Here, let us point out three principal features of traditional ethics. We can refer to them as Presentism, Anthropocentrism, and Individualism (or voluntarism). We have explained the first of these already. It must have been impossible for past ethical systems to imagine that one might have a responsibility for human beings living a thousand years later. Anthropocentrism can be described as the restriction of ethics and responsibility to human subjects and objects. As Jonas says, "ethics accordingly was of the here and now, of occasions as they arise between men, of the recurrent, typical situations of private and public life."[3] In a sense, it is reasonable or common sense to restrict ethical beings to humans. It seems nonsensical to accuse anyone of using violence when they punch a stone. What about animals, though? If one beats a dog or cat, a whale or dolphin, it probably can be regarded as "violence" or animal abuse, but it may be difficult to use terms like "abuse," "ill-treatment," and "murder" when describing the killing of a mosquito or a cockroach. This shows that the ethical criterion for judging what agents have to be respected consists in "proximity" (that is to say, degree of presence) to humankind.

Individual voluntarism refers to the idea that the traditional ethical agent was based on the individual and its will. Jonas writes as follows in his criticism of Kant's categorical imperative:

> Kant's categorical imperative was addressed to the individual, and its criterion was instantaneous. It enjoined each of us to consider what would happen if the maxim of my present action were made, or at this moment already were, the principle of a universal legislation; the self-consistency or inconsistency of such a hypothetical universalization is made the test for my private choice.[4]

Upon reconsidering the matter, it is this restriction of ethical agents to individuals and their wills that made it possible to ignore ethical responsibility for acts of violence or outrages in wartime committed in the name of the state or some other group. It was only in recent times that crimes against humanity during wartime began to be denounced or judged in the courtroom.

What was the cause of this limitation to the classic concept of ethics? According to Jonas, when the conventional concept of ethics was developed, the power of human action was not so great that it could destroy the world. When the force of scientific technology exceeds the scale imagined by previous ethics, we have no choice but to widen the scope of responsibility as new conditions might require. The measure of responsibility must correspond with that of power.

> It will be the burden of the present argument to show that these premises no longer hold, and to reflect on the meaning of this fact for our moral condition. More specifically, it will be my contention that with certain developments of our powers the nature of human action has changed, and, since ethics is concerned with action, it should follow that the changed nature of human action calls for a change in ethics as well: this not merely in the sense that new objects of action have added to the case material on which received rules of conduct are to be applied, but in the more radical sense that the qualitatively novel nature of certain of our actions has opened up a whole new dimension of ethical relevance for which there is no precedent in the standards and canons of traditional ethics. The novel powers I have in mind are, of course, those of modern technology.[5]

In his *Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas accuses Francis Bacon and his famous phrase "scientia est potentia" of being the source of a human arrogance that provoked the wholesale exploitation of the planet by technology for the purpose of expanding human health, wealth, and individual or social possibilities. Bacon himself, however, was not so naïve as to affirm such a human mastery, which justified treating and transforming nature as required or desired. Or rather, such a notion was beyond the reach of his imagination

because, for him, humans could only act under conditions of obedience to the laws of nature in order to have any practical effect on the external world. Bacon's understanding rested on the premise that it was impossible to manage, rule, and govern nature by force or to act contrary to nature. We might posit the image of an absolute, unwavering terra, a Great Mother who generously embraces her little demon of a child, no matter what he does with technology, behind which might be an overmastering confidence in the Creation and Acts of God. At least, the power of technology was not so big that it could destroy the world. "All this has decisively changed. Modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale, objects, and consequences that the framework of former ethics can no longer contain them."[6]

New concepts of "Globalization" and "Ethics"

From now on, we must change or extend the concept of globalization. Globalization does not mean only the economic and political movement of expansion all over the world, but also the technological movement that tends to encompass all beings, all lives, all generations, and all species. We must now call this all-inclusive movement or tendency "globalization." Above all, we need to recognize and emphasize its diachronic dimension in relation to its synchronic dimension. Globalization should not be reduced to a simple geographical concept of the world. More exactly, the planet's existence has to be considered or reflected as a continuum or a node, an extension from the past into the future, that is to say, a process of eternal becoming. Living in and reflecting on the present world cannot be done properly without this diachronic dimension of the world, without, so to speak, this "worldization" (this becoming of the world, world generation, world formation), another aspect (precisely, the other aspect) of "globalization." It reflects a certain "Genesis" without which we will lose our future generations and the significance or worth of our present world.

From this point of view, a new ethics will require following extensive turns:

1. From Presentism to Futurism (consideration of the world to come)
2. Form restrictive consideration for Humanity to general consideration for all lives or all beings

3. From individual subject to collective subject in responsibility

When scientific technology encompassed nuclear energy (nuclear power generation, atomic bomb), humans possessed (or have been possessed by) a power huge enough to destroy the planet. What is at stake is the very existence of all beings, the dilemma of whether "to be or not to be," in a very basic ontological sense, an elementary, physical ontology far beyond a metaphysical ontology like Heidegger's. Today, we find an ontological question directly related to physics as well as ethics, as in Spinoza's philosophy. We are on the verge of the ontological possibility of the world. What we are faced with is the possibility or rights of our future world, of future generations. Ultimately, this means the possibility itself of possibility, the generation of generation. Being is precisely the possibility of a world to come; in other words, the becoming of a world to come. We living humans in the present world must be responsible for the generation of our future generations, those who are not yet present. These generations do not exist in present space and time, nor can they make any response to our inquiry or call, much less have any right to do so. Of course, it is always possible that they will never ever come into being. What is threatened today, however, is the impossibility of their coming into being, the possibility itself of impossibility. Thus, even impossibility is on the verge of extinction. It is our ethical duty to protect and hand over at least this possibility of impossibility for generations to come. We are responsible for the beings who/which are incapable of responding. We are responsible for leaving open the possibility itself for future generations to respond to "us," to other beings, to the world. Giving the responsibility (the possibility of response) to those beings yet to come, to the becoming (a present to the future, of the future, for the future) is a new ethics, an extended, generic ethics. This is a kind of present, a donation of what we cannot have, what is outside of our property (because this present is theirs, their possibility/responsibility, not ours). Once, the existence of the world "had been a first and unquestionable given, from which all idea of obligation in human conduct started out. Now it has itself become an *object* of obligation; the obligation namely to ensure the very premise of all obligation, that is, the *foothold* for a moral universe in the physical world—the existence of mere *candidates* for a

moral order. This entails, among other things, the duty to preserve this physical world in such a state that the conditions for that presence remain intact; which in turn means protecting the world's vulnerability from what could imperil those very conditions."*(7)

Destruction of the natural environment, the use of atomic energy and radioactive waste, gene manipulation and its impact on our human descendants and the ecosystem: these phenomena and their consequences are difficult or principally impossible to know perfectly and predict because of the long time span, the gathering of data, the threshold of interpretation, etc. Now that the power and influence of technology might mean the total destruction of the world, however, this difficulty allow for no excuse any longer ("beyond expectation"). It would be irresponsible to use difficulty or impossibility as an excuse to refuse questions and arguments about what technology should be and how it should be used. On the basis of our understanding, knowledge, and information, an ethics of technology must go further. Such work will be impossible on the basis of scientific, technocratic, *technicien* logic alone. It needs collective arguments and responsible systems that are beyond specialties. We have to think "together" as a multiple, yet single being about what is desirable, what the world should be, and not only about what is made possible by technology.

Ethics for all beings

The second key point for a new ethics is the expansion of ethical objects from humans to all beings, all lives. Hans Jonas writes:

And what if the new kind of human action would mean that more than the interest of man alone is to be considered—that our duty extends farther, and the anthropocentric confinement of former ethics no longer holds? It is at least not senseless anymore to ask whether the condition of extrahuman nature, the biosphere as a whole and in its parts, now subject to our power, has become a human trust and has something of a moral claim on us not only for our ulterior sake but for its own and in its own right. If this were the case it would require quite some rethinking in basic principles of ethics. It would mean to seek not only the human good but also the good of things extrahuman, that is, to extend the recognition of "ends in

themselves" beyond the sphere of man and make the human good include the care for them.(8)

Jonas's argument here seems to limit the object of ethics to the "biosphere," but he affirms elsewhere the necessity of expanding ethical objects to all beings in the environment. It is certain that Jonas made great progress in extending ethics, but it is undeniable that he considers the human being to be a privileged, representative ethical subject who bears full responsibility for all the beings because of the enormous technological power humans possess. For this reason, there must be some concern that anthropocentrism lingers on in his work. He seems to be aware of this problem himself. He says

There is no need, however, to debate the relative claims of nature and man when it comes to the survival of either, for in this ultimate issue their causes converge from the human angle itself. Since, in fact, the two cannot be separated without making a caricature of the human likeness— since, rather, in the matter of preservation or destruction the interest of man coincides, beyond all material needs, with that of life as his worldly home in the most sublime sense of the word—we can subsume both duties as one under the heading "responsibility toward man" without falling into a narrow anthropocentric view.(9)

We do not have the time to treat this delicate problem, here taking his words in the banal sense that those who possess more power are obliged to take more responsibility.

If there is something left to be desired in Jonas's argument, it is that we need to count among the new ethical object/subjects that are "extrahuman" such entities as robots, computers, cyborgs, and genetically modified humans, because from now on our environment will include the ubiquitous computing network, whether or not equipped with artificial intelligence, and robots, which (who) perform hard and dangerous tasks impossible to humans, will be the important members of human society. We have to regard as companions of our world beings about whom or about which it would not make sense to ask whether they were natural or artificial, such as gene-manipulated humans. In such a situation, where should we draw the

boundary of ethics? Traditionally, ethics has regarded conscious beings as its objects, but if it is possible to think that there are "consciences" wherever there is the flow, exchange, and circulation of information, we have to treat them as participants in an ethical relationship. Needless to say, we have to recognize the risk of going too far in extending the ethical concept: everything would be an ethical object. We cannot, however, avoid a constant redefinition of being, life, conscience, etc., and without such a difficult problem, which in principle has no definitive answer, there would not be any fundamental ethics nor any sustainable society.

For the incalculable and the becoming of the world

The third and last feature of a new ethics is "Why should we expand the concept of ethical actor from the individual to the collective?" Because the technology in question is beyond the reach of our individuality. This is a matter of system. Any technology implies, in its essence, some impersonal elements. As individuals, we cannot control today's advanced technology, which becomes more and more expansive and complicated. It no longer consists simply of an individual, or one simple company, or one state, either in technological terms or in the mode of its production, diffusion, and use. That is why advanced technology cannot be placed under the control of a single agent. Because the mode of technology has been networked, so also must control, intervention, restructuring, and actors be networked. The heterogeneous, multiple actors must participate in a collective orientation of the technological ecosystem we live in. This collective multidimensional intervention will create our mode of being (presence) and our possibility (future). Although perfect self-determination is nothing but an illusion, it would be suicidal to abandon ourselves to a perfect heteronomy or to simply be conformist. Neither option would constitute an ethics for the future, which seeks the best direction.

The collectivity that we call for will not be restricted to the human collectivity. It not only contains things, animals, computers, and robots, but also beings to come, who (which) do not yet exist. More primordially, beings to come who (which) never exist; that is, the future itself, possibility itself. The ultimate actor in an ethics for the future is this power of being always open to the future.

Is such an ethics too heavy a task? An excessive

task? Faced with rapid changes in our society, it is very hard or even impossible to foresee even just a few years ahead, to say nothing of the future in one hundred years' time. Is it necessary to take responsibility for what is not foreseeable? For what is not countable? For what is impossible? It is an abuse of ethics, isn't it? This is not only the objection from utilitarianism, rationalism, or conservatism, but also from the traditional ethics that condemned them. This is precisely the bind of Presentism. If we recognize the importance or necessity of ethics, we need to create an ethics that counts what is not countable. Because what an econocentric and technocentric type of globalization tends to destroy is the being itself of the world and—what is more—the possibility itself of the being (or becoming) of the world. The existence of the world and its possibility are not things that are countable in their essence or in their "fact." It is the "basis" of this uncountable existence of the world that lends possibility to all the countables—politics, economy, law, society, culture, etc. From this point of view, an ethics that calculates the incalculable consists in an endeavor to make another calculation that makes possible all other calculations, beyond calculations. Without such a heterogeneous calculation, every technology or means, however sophisticated or advanced it may be, would be nothing but a makeshift.

We must not take the problem of globalization for only an economic or geopolitical one but extend it to another globalization; that of the ethics of being. That will be a true globalization. A globalization to come. A globalization of hope, hope for the future.

NOTE

(1)　Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Translated by Hans Jonas in collaboration with David Herr, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, p. 1.

(2)　*Ibid*., p. 5.

(3)　*Ibid*.

(4)　*Ibid*., p. 12.

(5)　*Ibid*., p. 1.

(6)　*Ibid*., p. 5.

(7)　*Ibid*., p. 10.

(8)　*Ibid*., p. 8.

(9)　*Ibid*., p. 136.