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oikonomia

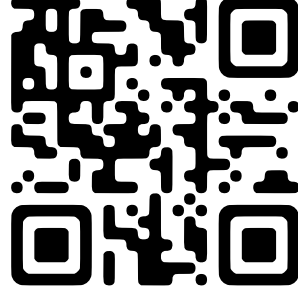
Technology, Theology, and Philosophy

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Envisioning Technology
through the
Mind of Christ



preface

This is a publication about technology. The term comes from Greek τεχνολογία - τέχνη (art, craft) λόγος (word, study).

Economics is a closely related field, or perhaps even a subfield.

The term economics comes from Greek οἰκονομία - οἶκος (house) νέμω (deal out, take, assign, manage). This is meant not in the sense of how the state might go about managing households - but rather, how a household might manage *itself*.

Economics as we know it today is horribly divorced from this notion. We seek to restore it to its proper place: at service of the household, and originating from it. You don't need money for economy.

When you start pursuing this (looking to the fullness and properness of things), instead of questions about 'rights', we find that there are deep-set problems not only with the world, but even our conceptions of it, that prevent us from living up to our full potential.

What is a husband's role? A wife's? What is the role of a family, even? Traditionalists, at least many of them, seem to point to 1950's America as a role model we should return to: the man "providing" for the family and the woman "keeping the home". Is this model actually the fullness of Christendom?

What if the feminist critique of this arrangement is actually borne out of real pain but simply *not radical (that is, root-cause) enough?*

Admittedly, this one feels a little out of my depth and I hope you can assume the best. As usual, write to us at mail@machinaeexdeo.com, join our discord, or comment on our site - this is an invocation to wrestle, not infallible doctrine.

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GOOD STEWARDSHIP

Scripture says plenty about stewardship, money, investing, and the like..

God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Gen 2:15)

The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord. (Ps 24:1)

[W]hoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor 9:6)

If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? (Luke 16:11)

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)

Our Lord so often uses the example of a steward and not a landowner in His parables. We are merely stewards of this Earth, and all titles and deeds that say we own it are legal fictions - useful and perhaps just laws of men - but ultimately vain in the eyes of God.

What is good stewarding, though? To make a return, it seems. But the unjust steward makes a return all right - a return for himself. The just steward makes a return for his Master - who gives a return to His faithful servant. In modern times, we seem to have reduced this idea of return down to dollars, but God does not regard the money of man as belonging to Himself (Mark 12:17).

If we return to Genesis, we will be reminded that God created and saw the world was good (Gen 1:31). He makes beasts to have fun (Ps 104:26). He delights in the multiplicity and diversity of creation, and he loves it for its own sake. Our stewardship should reflect the master's desires, prioritizing the good of the thing invested in over the market value that it has. Money may be the report card of business, but we don't get a better education by studying the numbers and rubrics to game the system. The desire for authenticity and the real is from God.



a mistaken measure

I'm sure you've heard of GDP before. The IMF describes it as so:

GDP measures the monetary value of final goods and services—that is, those that are bought by the final user—produced in a country in a given period of time (say a quarter or a year). It counts all of the output generated within the borders of a country. GDP is composed of goods and services produced for sale in the market... Not all productive activity is included in GDP. For example, unpaid work and black-market activities are not included because they are difficult to measure and value accurately. That means, for example, that a baker who produces a loaf of bread for a customer would contribute to GDP, but would not contribute to GDP if he baked the same loaf for his family.

It should be fairly obvious that if our goal is to make thriving households, this measure does not capture that - it is a measure for a nation, not a measure for a household. With this measure, we shouldn't be surprised if we sacrifice family for nation(alism).

The IMF concedes that it is too difficult to measure non-market work (true enough). Perhaps we can attribute this slip to difficulty rather than malice. But this is too fundamental of a slip - this is negligence, and leads us to very un-Christian ways of thinking.

The baker who gives away his bread for free - whether to his family or to a beggar - by the measure of GDP, sins. The woman who opts to stay at home (using less transportation), make meals (which a cook could do), mend clothes (instead of buying more or paying a tailor), and babysit her children (rather than put them in daycare), sins by the logic of GDP. The man who takes on fewer hours in order to raise crops and cows (earning less but sending less to the grocer) and fixing tools to repair his house with his children, rather than hiring a professional is condemned by the GDP-minded economist.

With GDP as a measure, we find ourselves favoring policies and technologies which push households away from subsistence living and into the market - even if this is not what they would want, and even if this means the actual breakdown of the household as a authentic mode of living.

I am not arguing that a subsistence-favoring way of life will have more *material* goods. I am arguing that such a way will furnish spiritual goods, and restore our sense of purpose; of meaning. After all, the economy is for man - not man for the economy.

The winter wind whistled in branches
On the banks of the Euphrates.
Oh, the walls of the Garden tilted
Suffring decay, these
Planes set by the Maker
Skewed by/against nature
Are heavy with negligence
Heavy with stones and negligence

Oh hear, our Designer!
Oh dear holy Carpenter!
Oh come, Inspiration!

Give warmth to these fingers
Set sparks to this tinder
Build a fire for our winter

Oh hear, our Designer!
Oh dear holy Carpenter!
Oh come, Inspiration!

Poem by Mark of
Full Stack Theology



The feminine mystique

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction... Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night - she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question - "Is this all?"

...
Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity... All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.

...
Many women no longer left their homes, except to shop, chauffeur their children, or attend a social engagement with their husbands. Girls were growing up in America without ever having jobs outside the home.

...
If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. It is far more important than anyone recognizes. It is the key to these other new and old problems which have been torturing women and their husbands and children, and puzzling their doctors and educators for years. It may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."



-Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963

I first read *The Feminine Mystique* a long time ago (while I would still describe myself as a red-blooded conservative) and was in near-complete agreement with this second-wave feminist - but - what is that something? Is it a career in the sexless free market? If that were the case, why do men feel a converse sort of longing? Is the 1950's housewife that Friedan describes even the biblical ideal?

Such household and gendered technologies would also favor traditional transmission of knowledge. That is to say, that one not only learns a list of facts about how to operate something, but is ushered into an entire realm and way of being - this is the actual techne-logos. This makes the resulting work fitting for children, who are thirsting to learn and be useful with their developing^[3] faculties. The boy learns to use the 1/4" chisel and sharpen it; after years of using it on smaller work like boxes and toys, he will graduate and deftly wield a 1-1/2" framing chisel to make a house. The principles of operation are the same, and they are ones that are irreducible to textbook learning. Even courses in schools as we know them today are insufficient to fully convey the technology of the chisel, as they leaves out the cultural aspects which are only accessible by living in the same world as the people using the tool. What better level to convey technology, then, than the household?

Children - the natural outgrowth from the meeting of the masculine and feminine - pose an opportunity forwards to rebuild the household as something gendered and generative. Parents, involve your children in the work of the house! If you find there is no work suitable for them, do not invent it, having them dig holes and fill them in. Rather, make a shift: take on work more fitting to a household rather than the global economy. Don't be surprised if this looks more like subsistence farming than investment banking. What sort of household would we offer a developing Jesus, the King-Child of all: one filled with fleeting pleasures, or one with work suitable to instill senses of wonder, mastery, competence, belonging, penance, and virtue?

The longings identified in *The Feminine Mystique* are not for something improper to the home - they are for true households and community.



[2] A 3D printer still shows signs of workmanship and culture. Has the machine been upkept well? Who designed the 3D model?

[3] It is a tragedy that we consider children to be 'undeveloped' rather than 'developing'; childhood is a stage of development, not a static state. Christ says we must be as children - and children are always becoming, never stagnant.

the household of proverbs

To a degree, the realms of man, woman, girl, and boy are somewhat arbitrary. While it seems nearly universal (and fitting to biology) that men build houses and women nurse infants, who tends the chickens or bakes the bread is subject to custom. The work chosen should still bring out the best in each sex, while understanding that there is still some qualities deemed feminine in the man, and some deemed masculine in the woman.

The man builds a shed and gives shelter to the cows - and yet, he weans and nurses them in due season.



It ought to be an aim that men and women admire each other without envy. I watch how women soothe their children or bake certain dishes and have no desire to do likewise - yet I appreciate what they do and how they excel at it. I have had many a woman in awe over some of my woodworking; I doubt that their thought was "I should like to do the same". And surely, the worlds must be attractive and fitting to their sex - the manner of housebuilding (or at least some aspect of it) must be attractive to men if they are to take it up.

On a technological standpoint, it seems to me that we should favor technologies which allow personality to shine forth. A chisel can be wielded by anyone, yet the character of the person - their care, strength, dexterity, amongst other qualities - is reflected in their finished product. A table saw is less so (yet still requires skill); a 3D printer even less so^[2]. The ability to push a button is equally fitting to either sex; in a way therefore, it is actually unfitting. Our machines, built to guarantee results regardless of who operates them, are incompatible with such notions of personality or gendered work. We need tools that are appropriate to men and women - not automations.

proverbs 31 : 10-31



A wife of noble character who can find
 She is worth more than rubies.
 Her husband has full confidence in her
 and lacks nothing of value.
 She brings him good, not harm.
 all the days of her life.
 She selects wool and flax
 and works with eager hands.
 She is like the merchant ships
 bringing her food from afar.
 She gets up while it is still night,
 she provides food for her family
 and portions for her female servants.
 She considers a field and buys it;
 out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
 She sets about her work vigorously;
 her arms are strong for her tasks.
 She sees that her trading is profitable,
 and her lamp does not go out at night.
 In her hand she holds the distaff
 and grasps the spindle with her fingers.
 She opens her arms to the poor
 and extends her hands to the needy.
 When it snows, she has no fear for her household,
 for all of them are clothed in scarlet.
 She makes coverings for her bed;
 she is clothed in fine linen and purple.
 Her husband is respected at the city gate,
 where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.
 She makes linen garments and sells them,
 and supplies the merchants with sashes.
 She is clothed with strength and dignity,
 she can laugh at the days to come.
 She speaks with wisdom,
 and faithful instruction is on her tongue.
 She watches over the affairs of her household
 and does not eat the bread of idleness.
 Her children arise and call her blessed;
 her husband also, and he praises her:
 "Many women do noble things,
 but you surpass them all."
 Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting;
 but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
 Honor her for all that her hands have done;
 and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

THE WOMAN OF PROVERBS

The woman of Proverbs 31, at first blush and modern eyes, may seem like a sort of primordial "girlboss" who outcompetes even the men of her world. But this would be a mistaken reading - after all, it is not her who takes a seat among the elders; it is her husband. Maybe she is oppressed in this way, or perhaps, she, much like her husband, has a complete (not inferior!) role in the household and in larger society. To use language that is found elsewhere in the bible, she excels *among women* just as her husband excels *among men*.

She stands complete, in a way. The woman of proverbs doesn't simply spend her husband's money wisely - heck, she launches ventures of her own! She opens *her gates* to the poor, *she provides* food to her family.

This vision - of the feminine as a complete world rather than an insufficient world dependent on the masculine - is a genuine answer to the feminist's complaints in light of the realities of sexual difference. It is foolish to expect men to compete in a woman's world (just as the inverse) - and it is actually worse yet: it is unfitting and invasive.

That woman should encroach far into masculine realms - or that man should do likewise - is out of at least stupidity and perhaps even envy.

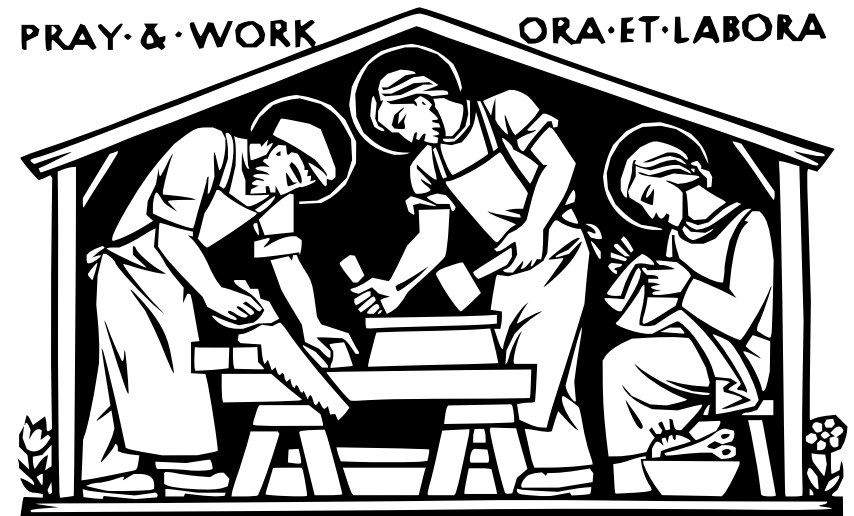
And yet, we have to recognize that if the masculine and feminine remain unmixed, they cannot proliferate. Their individual wholeness cannot fathom the superabundance that re-produces its life. New life comes from the interplay between these two complete realms. The particular way is unique to each culture, but there is, nonetheless, a way, a sort of dance or ritual: it extends beyond conception, into nursing, weaning, coming-of-age, marriage, and so forth.

In traditional cultures, this manifests as complimentary spheres. The exact roles and tools of each sex may vary culture-to-culture. Women may tend chickens, men cows. Boys and girls may even have their own spheres distinct from the adults. One can live on chicken alone, or beef alone - yes. But chickens can feed off insects in cow dung, and reclaim the spaces cows cannot. The worlds benefit from co-operation, even if not strictly demanded^[1]. Each brings their gift to the table: a gift unique and proper to them - a gift from their world which is not an arbitrary, but their birthright befitting their sex.

This is in stark contrast to the stereotypical 1950's model, which is informed more by the logic of the assembly line than scripture. The man brings raw material (especially in the form of money) to the woman, who toils in the kitchen and transforms it into actually usable goods (a meal, a clean and beautiful house). If the man ceases to bring in raw material, the wife cannot fulfill any of her duties. If the woman ceases to transform goods, man cannot eat money. And the kids, especially, are prohibited from productive activity altogether. This household is a hyper-specialized assembly line, not a symphony. The woman of proverbs would suffocate in such a paradigm.

The modern solution to this disintegration has, hilariously, been further fragmentation: the woman also participates in the cash game, increasingly outsourcing the actual acts of subsistence. Before, woman lacked a significant place in the home - now she lacks *any* place. In her work, a man will do just as well, and at home, she is ostensibly worse than experts in education, nursing, or entertainment. Outside the home too, the places and spheres for women only, are vanishing - as it is for men. As soon as men or women try to re-establish their worlds they are deemed 'exclusionary' (as if this is a bad thing). The woman of Proverbs would be equally lost and out of place now as in 1950.

How do we make our households fit for the Woman of Proverbs?



[1] It is fair to assert that historically, we have been required to produce much, and hence, a woman on her own struggled intensely. Arguably, this is a condition suffered moreso by women than men. This is an interesting thought but requires more space/time/scholarship/study to discuss...