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PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY ROMANO GUARDINI AND JACQUES ELLUL TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

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Abstract

Growing reliance upon technology as a source of power permeates practically all areas of human life and activity. Many Christian theologians and philosophers have dedicated themselves to reflecting upon technological power, which man has failed to manage responsibly for his own good and that of nature. This article attempts to present congruities between philosophical and theological reflections of two authors, one Catholic, Romano Guardini, and the other Protestant, Jacques Ellul, on understanding technological power. The article is divided into four parts. In the first part, there is a brief discussion of the technological and social situation after the Second World War. Both authors base their reflections upon the assumption that God has been ejected from public and cultural life. Such a situation has resulted from the dominance of technology, whose key feature is ambiguity. The second part deals with a new dimension that the authors note in the approach to technological reality, its sacralisation that leads to the desacralisation of nature and the instrumentalization of the person. The third part deals with possible solutions for ensuring human survival in the struggle with technological power. Guardini finds a possible way out in the ethical power of humility and service, while Ellul stresses the theological ethic of *nonpower* as free renunciation of the use of power. In the fourth part, the reception of the authors' theological ideas on the magisterium of Popes Benedict XVI and Francis is examined, with focus on two of their documents that explicitly deal with the subject of technological power. While one emphasizes the ambivalence toward technology, the other reflects on the logic of the technocratic paradigm.

Key words: technological power, theological ethics, modern, religious element, profanity, sacrality, power over power, nonpower, service.

Introduction

Power has certainly been one of the most recurrent subjects in philosophical thought throughout history. With the development of contemporary technology, power has assumed new dimensions and calls for a deeper understanding of the specifics of its internal logic on at least two levels: firstly, on the conceptual manifestation of power through technology, that is, a technocratic paradigm, and secondly, on its actual consequences, both positive and negative, in terms of socio-political and philosophic-theological impact. Through reason, man acquires an ability and power with which he attempts to shape the world around him and, thereby, improve his living conditions and live a dignified life. In this, he is considerably aided by technology as an art, which makes him a technological being. It can be said that, technology is engraved in his essence as an integral component and the manner in which he deals with and manages nature. Nevertheless, the speed and sophistication of the development of various technologies always entails a danger of a lack of restraint in the acquisition and control of such power. Therefore, today it is difficult and nearly impossible to view technology as a mere means but rather as a reality that must be taken seriously in order to place it within the framework of serving humankind.

Cognizant of this unbridled technological speed and power, these two philosophers and theologians laid the critical foundations for the proper evaluation of technology and its responsible use. Our research led us to conclude that their work as individuals has not been studied sufficiently, and that the wealth of their reflections on this subject exhibits considerable congruity. Romano Guardini (1885–1968) was Catholic, while Jacques Ellul (1912–1994) was Protestant. Although everyone rightfully starts from the specific nature of one's religious heritage, there is significant synergy of their opinions and views on technology. Therefore, this article has a type of ecumenical dimension and direction because each author has left a significant mark on the Christian understanding of technology. This ecumenical dimension also becomes an invitation for the pooling of intellectual and spiritual forces in shaping the technological society in which we find ourselves, regardless of our religious affiliations. In this article, we neither intend to present all the authors who deal with the subject of power, nor do we wish to present the authors who influenced the ideas of these two. Our aim is not to point out all philosophical and theological reflections of these authors about power as such, but to focus on technological power and the congruence of their thoughts on this subject. We shall attempt to point out some emphasis in the reception of their ideas in the

Church documents and, thereby, actualize their views in the postmodern and post-Christian context of the technocratic paradigm.

1. A new dimension of the industrial and post-Christian technological civilization

1.1. Some post-war scientific emphases

Events in society undoubtedly prompted the two authors and others to think about »new things« which, on the one hand, cause wonder and admiration, while on the other, concern about of necessity of thinking differently about the future. We find ourselves at a time affected by the adversities of war, which brought the development of weapons technology and industrial society. With reference to industry, technological innovations occur in a specific political-economic context, i.e., the modern capitalist economy in which technologies are the driving forces. As far as weapons technology is concerned, it suffices to mention an event of apocalyptic proportions in 1945, when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Arthur Koestler described this event as follows: »If I were asked to name the most important date in the history and prehistory of the human race, I would answer without hesitation, 6 August 1945. The reason is simple. From the dawn of consciousness until 6 August 1945, man had to live with the prospect of his death as the *individual*; since the day when the first atomic bomb outshone the sun over Hiroshima, mankind as a whole has had to live with the prospect of its extinction as a *species*. (...) The trouble is that an invention, once made, cannot be disinvented. The nuclear weapon has come to stay; it has become part of the human condition. Man will have to live with it permanently: not only through the next confrontation-crisis and the one after that; not only through the next decade or century, but forever—that is, as long as mankind survives. The indications are that it will not be for very long.«¹ Man clearly no longer believes in a future permeated by God's presence. We find ourselves amidst the destructive power of the human race, in which *Homo creator* and *Homo technologicus* dominate.

Let us only acknowledge two contemporary authors whose works deal with the technicalization of human civilization. Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World*, published in 1932,² is a work of science fiction whose contents are becoming a reality today, especially in the transhumanist desire for us to become

¹ Arthur KOESTLER, *Janus: A summing up*, New York, 1978, 1–2.

² Cf. Aldous HUXLEY, *Brave New World* (1932), New York, 2000.

invulnerable and perfect beings. In the early post-war period, more precisely 1948, Norbert Wiener published *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*,³ in which he clearly heralds the concrete problems of technological civilization, all the way to the ideological negation of the uniqueness of man, who can be hybridized with a machine and thus become a *cyborg*. Life becomes information, genetic code, genes etc. It is not only a matter of the industrial development of a society but directions are indicated that lead us to a technocratic mentality. Such a mentality is more clearly manifested today through various convergent systems, such as NBIC (Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology, Cognitive science) and GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft). Technology, as a deciding factor in society, has formed what can be considered a »technological system« because, according to the logic of exponential growth, interconnections, diversification and growing complexification⁴ unite all essential subsystems of a society they organize according to their own internal logic. In the area of theology, such a society ignores the mystery of the incarnation, with its salvific and moral implications, as particularly noted by thinkers such as Karl Barth, Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau, Ivan Illich and, in a special way, Hans Jonas, through the philosophy of organisms and environmental ethics.⁵ For these authors, the concept of incarnation is one of the foundations for their criticism of the industrial and technological society, which is characterized by »spasmodic tension arising from the imposed requirement to be fast and functionally-technologically efficient with regards to the demands of the organizational, industrial-technological or general mega-social apparatus.«⁶ Salvation from such a society lies in discovering the beauty of a genuine religious experience.

1.2. *On the importance of the religious element*

After the Second World War, Guardini reflected upon the end of the modern age,⁷ with all its value systems and nearly absolute faith in progress, while Ellul

³ Cf. Norbert WIENER, *Cybernetics, Second Edition: or the Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (1948), Cambridge, 1961.

⁴ Cf. Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological System*, New York, 1980, 276.

⁵ For more on this subject, see: Daniel CÉRÉZUELL, La technique et la chair. De l'ensarkosis logou à la critique de la société technicienne chez Bernard Charbonneau, Jacques Ellul et Ivan Illich, in: *European Journal of Social Sciences*, XLIII (2005) 132, 5–30.

⁶ Davor ŠIMUNEC – Hrvoje ZOVKO, Značenje vremena i povijesti prema Romanu Guardiniju, in: *Obnovljeni život*, 72 (2017) 1, 57.

⁷ Cf. Romano GUARDINI, *The End of the Modern World/Power and Responsibility*, Wilmington, Delaware, 1998.

contemplated a new way of being in such a new age.⁸ The paradox of the new age view of man, according to Guardini, is that, on the one hand, man continues to be at the centre of everything, almost like a deified being, because he has become the measure for the values of life, transforming subjectivity into personality,⁹ while on the other hand, the scientific-technological culture deprives him of his primary attribute and centre of being, i.e., the fact that the human person is created by God and oriented toward God. Such a misconception of man wrests him away from the Source, leads to the misconception of power as a sign and condition of progress—both scientific and social.¹⁰ Therefore, man in his freedom has not only turned against himself but also against the created world, which, aided by technology, he exploits instead of protecting. The root of everything is found in the rejection of religiosity, the issue of Christian Revelation and its value for human life and nature, which for the new age man has become profane reality. Such an »autonomous« view of the world ignores the fact that survival is impossible without the supernatural. Without the religious element, i.e., man's supernatural foothold in God, all human power is corrupted and aspires to supplant God. Thus, according to Guardini, the issue of power is always an issue of the ability to effect certain change, but this change does not occur without purpose, i.e., without being oriented toward God as the source and end of true power. Power, as the ability to make change, has an auto reflexive dimension. Briefly, power includes awareness of this ability and becomes fully achievable to the extent that one relies upon God. Unless power is imbued with the three dimensions of ability, awareness and inclusion of the supernatural, it becomes violence and disorder. Guardini points out that without the religious element, life becomes an engine that has run out of oil, overheats and, every now and then, something burns out. Instead of the parts corresponding precisely, as they should, they interfere with one another. The centre and connections are lost. Existence is disorganized.¹¹ The management of omnipresent power, as an essential dimension of a human being, deprived of faith and wrested away from nature, culture and responsibility, inevitably gives rise to violence against man and his freedom. Nuclear weapons and the current climate crisis are merely several specific examples of the power of self-destruction.

⁸ Cf. Jacques ELLUL, *Presence in the Modern World*, Eugene, 2016.

⁹ Cf. Romano GUARDINI, *The End of the Modern World/Power and Responsibility*, 30–32.

¹⁰ Cf. Tonči MATULIĆ, *Metamorphoses of Culture. A Theological Discernment of the Signs of the Times Against the Backdrop of Scientific-Technical Civilisation*, Berlin-Münster-Wien-Zürich-London, 2018, 385.

¹¹ Cf. Romano GUARDINI, *La fin des temps modernes suivi de La puissance*, Paris, 2016, 107.

1.3. *On technological ambiguity*

According to Ellul, the perpetual and ubiquitous technological dimension of modern human society is becoming the driving force instead of a means for survival. It has become a *modus vivendi* and essential, rather than an accidental or secondary reality. Combining theological reflection with a socio-critical view of modern technology, Ellul believes that the dichotomous way of life that technology foists upon us should be shunned because »God became incarnate; it is not our job to disincarnate him,«¹² but rather by the power of faith it is necessary to resist the »technical establishment of suicide« in order to achieve a genuine »human civilization.«¹³ Specifically, there was a change in man and his attitude toward technology, and not a change in technology as such. With this change in man's attitude, technology merely acquired a new paradigmatic function and feature. Disruptive technology, therefore, not only brings about brutal social changes but also anthropological changes and controlled scientific discourse because it is imbued with certain ideologies. Hence, technology is not ethically neutral¹⁴ but has certain values and socio-cultural guidelines. In other words, technology creates a system of power and domination that can be anthropological, economic, political or cultural in nature. When several technologies use the same processes and methods, by employing various algorithms and data, network diversity is created until specific changes are imposed that we heedlessly accept, almost with a sense of alienation. Thus, no one can escape this domination, which becomes a collective acquiescence to power. A simple example of this is the ubiquitous use of mobile devices with applications that, in many places of the world, determine culinary traditions, number of steps taken, routes taken, must-see entertainment etc. Life without them is becoming unimaginable. Ellul presents the main ideas of his critique of the technological society in a trilogy.¹⁵ His final work, published posthumously, *Théologie et Technique*,¹⁶ provides concise insight into his reflections on the relationship between theology and technology. In his opinion, the technological, i.e., post-Christian, society is characterized by the dissolution of goals and endless multiplication

¹² Jacques ELLUL, *Presence in the Modern World*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴ Cf. Tonči MATULIĆ, *Metamorphoses of Culture*, 396.

¹⁵ Cf. Jacques ELLUL, *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, Paris, 2008 [*The Technological Society*, New York, 1964]; Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological System*; Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological Bluff*, Michigan, 1990.

¹⁶ Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et Technique. Pour une éthique de la non-puissance*, Genève, 2014.

of (technological) means, in which certain intentions are already engraved. In such logic, goals are sacrificed in the name of efficiency as the supreme value.

In the spirit of Guardini's picturesque depiction of the consequences that arise in the modern world due to the exclusion of the religious element from society, Ellul describes these consequences and connects them with technological intentionality. Namely, technology is an intrinsically ambiguous reality.¹⁷ Therefore, it is impossible to distinguish its beneficial and destructive consequences. One of the original features of Ellul's attitude toward technology is clearly manifested in a special way. Technology is ambiguous, which means that it is neither good nor bad nor neutral, because at the same time it produces positive effects for the benefit of man and devastating consequences, to man's misfortune. Ellul's contemporary Martin Heidegger particularly emphasizes that it is illusionary to consider technology to be a neutral reality: »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.«¹⁸ The technological world, consequently, possesses various determinants whose nature does not depend on us because it imposes the manner of using technology upon us. Thus, it is unsustainable and unacceptable to discuss the essence of technology with simplistic arguments, such as *it all depends upon how technology is used*. Although such an explanation is not wholly inaccurate, it nonetheless belongs to moral judgments made by users of technological tools. Every technology is an intentional activity that takes place in a specific social environment and establishes dialogue with various values and areas. A fundamental consequence is that it separates man from the Source and transforms itself into a sacred reality. While according to Guardini, the modern man transforms the sacred into profane reality, for Ellul the same man transforms profane means into sacred reality.

¹⁷ Cf. Jacques ELLUL, *Réflexions sur l'ambivalence du progrès technique*, in: *La Revue administrative*, 106 (1965), 380–391; Jacques ELLUL, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, 393–409; Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological Bluff*, 34–76.

¹⁸ Martin HEIDEGGER, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York & London, 1977, 4.

2. The sacredness of the technological rule

Despite the obvious benefits and miraculous contents for the good of man, technology remains a fruit of human activity and, as such, bears the mark of human shortcomings, uncertainties and impermanence. Such a mark is consequently reflected in all other areas of human life, as well as the biosphere itself. In this way, various forms of life in general, and dimensions of human life in particular, from culture to human nature, are affected. However, technology as such is neither a sin nor a fruit of sin. In the spirit of Ellul's reflections, it is a fruit of a situation in which sin has placed man. The main characteristic of this situation is the rule of necessity, enslavement, from which only freedom in Christ and through Christ can save him.¹⁹ At the heart of technological logic, therefore, is the issue of power, i.e., dominion over nature and, ultimately, over man himself in all the segments of his life. Guardini had the same idea. For him, technology is actually a specific form of rule that decides whether to be or not to be. Thus, »technology moves forward in the final analysis neither for profit nor for the well-being of the race. He knows in the most radical sense of the term that power is its motive (...). His action bespeaks immense possibilities not only for »creation« but also for destruction, especially for the destruction of humanity itself. (...) Man's relations with nature have reached the point of final crisis: man will either succeed in converting his mastery into good—then his accomplishment would be immense indeed—man will either do that or man himself will be at an end.«²⁰

These words implicitly herald Ellul's previously noted idea about the ambiguity of technology, but also the desacralising attitude toward nature and the sacralising attitude toward technology. Desacralising the factor of nature becomes the centre of a new sacredness, and this centre is called technology, as an expression of man's power, without which he would remain fundamentally impoverished. In this attitude, Guardini nevertheless still sees something religious, but such a religiosity no longer has any connection with nature or traditional religiosity.« This religious feeling (...) is bound up intrinsically with the dangers for himself and for his earth which man has found locked up with his technological power.«²¹ The main feature of this religiosity is man's sense of loneliness and anxiety amidst the technological abundance and the new

¹⁹ Frédéric ROGNON, *Jaques Ellul. Une pensée en dialogue*, Genève, 2013, 119–126.

²⁰ Romano GUARDINI, *The End of the Modern World/Power and Responsibility*, 56.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

world that technology has brought. Such a world is not only full of abundance but also total and absolute unpredictability.²² The richer we are in technological achievements, the poorer we are in the genuine ability to foresee some events. Let us touch upon, incidentally, the example of our inability to foresee and find a quick solution to the Covid-19 pandemic, despite all the sophisticated technological advances.

When it comes to our religious attitude toward technology, a fundamental clarification should be borne in mind. »It is not technology itself which enslaves us, but the transfer of the sacred into technology. That is what keeps us from exercising the critical faculty, and from making technology serve human development.«²³ Furthermore, technology brings more problems than it solves. The positive and negative effects of technology are inseparable. It may be said that it is a distorted, i.e., deranged religiosity. Technology is man's new space that has replaced natural space. It is man's new sacred reality, in which we are all devout idolaters. It suffices to mention the dynamics of our socializing, in which everyone is glued to their own screen and more connected to the virtual world and those far away than to the real world and those with whom we are sitting across a table. Not only is there idolatry but also a denial of the beauty of fellowship with our next-door neighbour. Ellul, therefore, urges the modern man immersed in a technological and post-Christian condition to profane this technological sacredness. Although it is difficult to »wrest from man«²⁴ that which is sacred, the sacredness of the technological rule is shown here, as previously pointed out by Guardini, to be a break with God. It is clearly manifested in man's desire to worship himself and thereby make himself the centre of events. In this he is significantly aided by technology, to the extent of expelling God. Consequently, before the mysticism of the new technological gods, »technological power has replaced the power of the Creator«²⁵ and established various contradictions in man, without any possibility for harmonious internal permeation. These contradictions form a category structure that overlooks the integrity of a specific living being and negates in him that which transcends the rational and material dimension, retaining only unilateral visions, definitions and successes. Guardini considers these modern attitudes to be polar opposites, in which two determinants, in this context man and technology, are mutually exclusive, yet remain connected

²² Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological Bluff*, 91–92.

²³ Jacques ELLUL, *The new demons*, 206.

²⁴ Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et Technique*, 203.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

and subordinate to each other.²⁶ On the one hand, man yearns for alterity, human and divine, and on the other hand worships himself. Therefore, Ellul says that man worships himself and at the same time hates himself, insatiably seeking himself in the transient. This is a fruit of all-encompassing technological sacrality, albeit without the spirit of synthesis. Through the sacralisation of technology, man descends into a state of slavery, the inner logic of which is manifested as follows: »The human being who acts and thinks today is not situated as an independent subject with respect to a technological object. He is inside the technological system, he is himself modified by the technological factor. The human being who uses technology today is by that very fact the human being who serves it. And conversely, only the human being who serves technology is truly able to use it.«²⁷ The original author of this perfidious internal logic is man himself. Technology, as the work of his hands, renders him a slave, helps him turn stone into bread, and that makes him happy. Nevertheless, not understanding why he is still not in paradise after such a miracle, man is beset by anxiety. It is a »technological kingdom« divided in itself, characterized by a lack of permanence. Here, the Devil parodies himself but does so due to the fruit of the parody itself, whose name is technology as a parody of the natural. According to Guardini, this technological power is substantially objectified and determined by the logic of scientific and instrumental rationalism, which means that »power has become demonic.«²⁸ This is a sign that it is the rule of the subjective, in which anthropo-technological principles predominate, denying every form of otherness mediated by religious experience²⁹ and the ontological dimension of the human person, with the emphasis on orientation toward the self and one's own desires. Such a rule has given rise to a different, i.e., non-Christian form of life, in which Revelation has become controversial, since the rejection of human life imbued with religiosity has occurred.³⁰ No longer is there genuine spiritual contemplation of the Creator,

²⁶ Cf. Romano GUARDINI, *Der Gegensatz: Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*, Mainz/Paderborn, 1998, 28. On some actualizations of various polar opposites, see: Ivica ŽIŽIĆ, Liturgija kao umjetnost i igra kod Romana Guardinija, in: *Diacovensia* 23 (2015) 3, 295–296; Davor ŠIMUNEC, Promišljanja o čovjeku kao biću dinamičko–dijalektičke napetosti u nekim djelima Romana Guardinija, in: *Obnovljeni život*, 71 (2016) 2, 197; Ivica RAGUŽ, Kršćanski – katolički svjetonazor prema Romanu Guardiniju in: *Diacovensia* 23 (2015) 3, 285–289.

²⁷ Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological System*, 325.

²⁸ Romano GUARDINI, *The End of the Modern World/Power and Responsibility*, 83.

²⁹ Cf. Anđelko DOMAZET, Religija i vjera. Opće religiozno iskustvo i kršćanska posebnost po Romanu Guardiniju, in: *Bogoslovska smotra* 84 (2014) 2, 272.

³⁰ Cf. Šimo ŠOKČEVIĆ, Filozofija moći Romana Guardinija, in: *Diacovensia* 23 (2015) 3, 265.

which explains the emotional and every other type of coldness, inner division and emptiness.³¹ Instrumentalization of the person and depersonalization of power through the »non-human« condition occur because the person is altered, while his attitude toward nature and experience of things becomes utilitarian and calculated.

In the works of both authors, we can establish that the sacredness of the technological rule is manifested in religiosity, loneliness, division, artificiality, instability and inner turmoil, with technology occasionally providing some ostensible fulfilment and a heavenly state. From this arises a type of self-enslavement. Technology simultaneously enslaves man in his finitude, provides illusionary fulfilment of his desire for the eternal and offers him the possibility of suicide, but does not succeed in radically ousting God. Therefore, it put man in such a position that he has to eliminate God. However, it is man, and not technology, who ultimately decides on the death of God. Technology merely places this power and possibility in man's hands. Paradoxically, eradicating God from oneself means the death of oneself, i.e., »the collective death« of humankind.³²

Far from demonizing technology, these authors, within the context of their time, merely seek to warn of the paradigmatic change in the human soul in the face of technological power that enchants man into a state of turning against God, resulting in the loss of self. Nevertheless, the greatness of their ideas is in their prophetic dimension, which especially applies to contemporary society. Lest this philosophical and theological investigation of the congruence of their thoughts be negative in tone, let us see what they offer in response and as a possibility for living properly in a technological society.

3. Power over power and nonpower

3.1. Guardini's ethic of the power of humility and service

Firstly, it is necessary to proceed from the fact that man exceeds that which positivism, materialism, idealism, existentialism etc. say about him. He is indeed a finite being but »he is also a real person—irreplaceable in his unique act of being—one whose dignity cannot be supplanted, whose responsibility

³¹ Cf. Anđelko DOMAZET, *Život u dijalogu s Bogom. Teologija i praksa molitve u spisima Romana Guardinija*, Zagreb, 2009, 75–102.

³² Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et Technique*, 38.

cannot be avoided.«³³ Accordingly, his attitude toward technological power can be directed through independence, dignity and responsibility toward himself, as well as toward creation and the world entrusted to him. In this sense, the power acquired through technology can be ambiguous and cause a »humane« person to do what he should not do. Here Guardini presents an actual situation, which we can agree with today: »Close examination proves that recent years have been marked by a monstrous growth in man's power over being, over things and over men, but the grave responsibility, the clear consciousness, the strong character needed for exercising this power well have not kept pace with its growth at all.«³⁴ There is a dearth of training in the responsible management of power, while abuses are increasing. Such training is not an individual matter but extends to the entire society because »monstrosities of such conscious design do not emerge from the calculations of a few degenerate men or of small groups of men; they come from processes of agitation and poisoning which had been long at work.«³⁵ Under the influence of unbridled power, we have fallen into a state of collective (ir)responsibility, from which we can only extricate ourselves with the power of moral norms, responsibility and a collective arousal of conscience. The hope for the use of such collective and awake consciousness does not lie in power itself but, according to Guardini, in the likelihood that »at best we could have the mere probability that [men and women] would use it for the good.«³⁶ In good will, Guardini finds a potential solution for combating the acute and chronic destruction caused by scientific and technological power. Moderation becomes a source of existential harmony, using which power without norms and responsibility can be defeated. If we neglect this, it can rightly be said that man will always »live at the brink of an ever-growing danger which shall leave its mark upon his entire existence.«³⁷

Such a warning finds its prophetic aspect in the destructive dimensions of modern technologies, which not only affect the adult but already enter into the cradle of life by determining what kind of people merit humanity and to what measure it is necessary to perfect people, in order for them to be devoid of any shortcomings. The prophetic aspect of Guardini's statement consists of the fact that our use of technological power is gradually relieving us of the

³³ Romano GUARDINI, *The End of the Modern World/Power and Responsibility*, 80.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 82.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 86.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 90.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

obligation to be vigilant and leading us to increasing stultification and blindness. Namely, man »stands again before chaos, a chaos more dreadful than the first because most men go their own complacent ways without seeing, because scientifically-educated gentlemen everywhere deliver their speeches as always, because the machines are running on schedule and because the authorities function as usual.«³⁸ This ostensible organization of society perfidiously leads to ruin. It is possible to save ourselves from it through gravity based on truth, the courage to live the humanity given to us, and interior freedom from the shackles and technological sect of power. Through such virtues, Guardini rightly points out that what we consider fundamental in order to curb technological power, the need for a »spiritual art of government through which man could exercise power over power.«³⁹ Such *power over power* places technology within the framework of a means for human dignity and joy. *Power over power* can also be achieved through the ability to define educational, political and economic boundaries and to promote the ethic of correct decision making, inspired by constant immersion in the mystery of God—the Creator and Saviour.

Guardini's critique of technological power does not mean that he opposed technological progress but that he opposed the aforementioned ambiguity of technology, the dogmatization of technology up to the denial of human dignity and freedom. Guardini finds another way in which *power over power* can be achieved in the biblical concept of power, which is exercised through obedience to God the Creator. True power is manifested in man's ability to obey God and serve him.⁴⁰ Such obedience does not signify obstructing technological progress but is the immaculate dimension of power and a disposition to collaborate with God, including serving that liberates, not captures. We can say that a person is realized precisely through this liberating dependence on God and surrender to him (and not through searching for unconditional autonomy from God as a rival!), which gives rise to immersion in the fullness of the truth about oneself and about God. An example of such an attitude of humility and service comes from the nonpower of Christ's cross, from his self-sacrifice to God out of obedience and in freedom, »for us and for our salvation«, as St. Paul points out in his Christological hymn: »His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross« (Phil 2: 6–8). Following the

³⁸ *Ibid*, 92.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 94.

⁴⁰ Cf. Šimo ŠOKČEVIĆ, *Filozofija moći Romana Guardinija*, 270.

example of Jesus' humility, a man lives a pro-existential life, in which he is not cantered solely upon himself and his desires, but fosters charity through self-giving to others. True power, therefore, is characterized by humility, not as a sign of weakness but as the power of serving, with which he wants to manage world events responsibly and justly. This is the power of the cross as the power of nonpower that is more powerful than the rule of instrumental reason, practical materialism, destructive individualism, utilitarian ambition, hedonism or technological power. The cross stands as a sign of the willingness to perform humble service and offers liberating power.⁴¹ In this, according to Guardini, lies the significance of the virtue of power that is so capable of controlling itself that it can set boundaries for itself.

3.2. Ellul's theological ethic of nonpower

While Guardini promotes the philosophical and theological paradigm of *power over power itself* through virtues such as service, responsibility, freedom, dignity, genuine religiosity, obedience and humility, Ellul poses an axiom from which his philosophical and theological ethic of *nonpower* is derived.⁴² Of course, Ellul also offers other ethical principles, such as the ethic of *freedom, conflict and transgression*. However, we shall remain with the ethic of nonpower and note how its axiom stresses the definition of boundaries that cannot be transgressed: *Infinite development is unimaginable in a finite world*. Such an axiom reveals the fact that technology gradually ceases to serve as a means and becomes the purpose. To reveal one's Christian calling means to become a revolutionary like Jesus, who made himself »powerless« through the logic of humility and free surrender. The correct ethic that holds true in such a technological society is the ethic of *nonpower*. What does it consist of? The logic of *nonpower* does not mean powerlessness, incompetence or a lack of options or means. It means being able, but not wanting to do something. This is the renunciation of the option to use destructive power. It is the opposite of the logic of unbridled technological domination. There are three different key concepts at work: *power* as the ability to do, *powerlessness* as the inability to do, and *nonpower* as the ability to do and the choice not to. Accordingly, *powerlessness* is

⁴¹ Tonči MATULIĆ, *Metamorphoses of Culture*, 410.

⁴² Cf. Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et Technique*, 312–328; cf. Odilon-Gbènoukpo SINGBO, Vidljiva i nevidljiva moć tehnologije očitovana u tehnokratskoj paradigmi, in: Stjepan BALOBAN – Dubravka PETROVIĆ ŠTEFANAC (ed.), *Laudato si'! Kako mijenjati stil života*, Zagreb, 2020, 97–99.

not a choice but destiny, imposed passivity or inactivity. It cannot, therefore, be spoken of as an ethical principle. *Nonpower*, as we have defined it, not only has an ethical dimension but a spiritual one because the Spirit of nonpower is actually the concrete manifestation of the Spirit of true life. We encounter this theological ethic of nonpower in Jesus' attitude during his dialogue with Pilate: »Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind« (Jn 18: 36–37). Jesus could have manifested his royal power but intentionally renounced the logic of domination. If we consider the dynamics of the contemporary technological society, it is easy to see that powerlessness is the state in which man finds himself. Therefore, it can be said that the logic of nonpower opposes the logic of power.⁴³ It is a spiritual ethic and an antidote against every type of rivalry and power competition in business, scientific research and among individuals. As with Guardini, Ellul's ethics involve determining limits, as the most humane aspect of freedom, responsibility and a sign of the true realization of one's calling. Such an ethic is a structural principle and also an »antidote to Adam and Eve's sin of pride and wanting more power, by which they lost their original place.«⁴⁴ This is the complete opposite of *hubris*, the thirst for power and domination. The ethic of nonpower calls for an imitation of God's self-giving, which does not come from any compulsion or necessity, but from free love toward man. The path to the realization of such an ethic does not follow the logic of the philosophy of disembodiment, the spirit of power, the desire for power or partial power, or moralizing through horizontal theology. Man is faced with only one choice, between recognizing God's transcendence, with everything that it causes, or man's total enslavement, bound hand and foot by the technological system. It must not be forgotten that the more absolute the system becomes, the more chaos it simultaneously provokes.⁴⁵

For both Guardini and Ellul, the lack of *power over power* or *nonpower* ethics plunge us into the chaos that characterizes technological and post-Christian society. Drawing from the rich ideas of these authors, many Church leaders have actualized their view of technological power in the context of the

⁴³ Cf. Frédéric ROGNON, *L'alterité à l'épreuve des technosciences*, in: SEMAINES SOCIALES DE FRANCE, *L'homme et les technosciences, défi*, Paris, 2015, 110.

⁴⁴ Joseph THAM, *From Technopower to Ecological Conversion*, in: Fernando Chica ARELLANO – Alberto García GOMEZ (ed.), *Laudato si': l'appello di papa Francesco: sviluppo agricolo e lotta alla fame*, Italia, 2016, 97.

⁴⁵ Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et Technique*, 328.

postmodern era, which is more immersed than previously in the technocratic mentality. We single out two former Popes, Benedict XVI and Francis.

4. Impact of two authors on several Catholic documents

4.1. Benedict XVI: Technology overcomes technology

Ruminations on technology or technocratic power can easily devolve into technolatry or even technophobia, arousing mixed feelings of excessive hope, suspicion and sadness. It must be reiterated here that technology is neither to be regarded as the work of Satan nor as the fundamental solution to all human problems. Today, thinking about technological reality certainly requires consulting the writings of predecessors, such as Guardini and Ellul. Such consultation becomes urgent when we consider man's unbridled power over himself and nature, owing to the exponential growth in technological advances. We can rightly state that »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.«⁴⁶ Such power cannot leave the Church as Mother and Teacher indifferent.

Pope Benedict XVI devotes the sixth chapter of his encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate*, entitled *The Development of Peoples and Technology*, to this issue. Without neglecting the importance and grace of scientific and technological progress, the Pope criticizes the spirit of technological absolutism and the culture of death, which are connected with technology when it is left to itself, outside man's responsibility. To the Pope, technology is never a neutral reality. There is no doubt that Ellul's view of technological ambivalence is echoed here, as is clearly emphasized in that important Catholic document. Ellul's position is clearly reflected in a significant statement by the Pope: »Technology is never merely technology (...). Technological development can give rise to the idea that technology is self-sufficient when too much attention is given to the 'how' questions, and not enough to the many 'why' questions underlying human activity. For this reason technology can appear ambivalent.«⁴⁷ In an analysis of Pope Paul VI's earlier *Populorum progressio*, Pope Benedict XVI

⁴⁶ Clive Staples LEWIS, *The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education With Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*, Québec, 2014, 29.

⁴⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate*. Encyclical letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth (29. VI. 2009), no. 69–70. Available from: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (Accessed: 4. X. 2020), (Hereinafter: CV).

notes the same ambiguous dimension of technology: »Technology, viewed in itself, is ambivalent. If on the one hand, some today would be inclined to entrust the entire process of development to technology, on the other hand we are witnessing an upsurge of ideologies that deny *in toto* the very value of development, viewing it as radically antihuman and merely a source of degradation.«⁴⁸ The ideological dimension of technology is rightly under attack here because technology is becoming the sole factor that decides the directions of progress, while other dimensions of human life are ignored. With the logic of Bacon's axiom, *scientia est potentia*, technocratic ideology attempts to interfere in all aspects of development and life, creating both good and bad results. Here, in a new guise, the dangers that Ellul had noted earlier are accentuated. Ignoring other dimensions of human life leads to a unilateral approach to technological reality, whereby ethics are excluded, as indicated by Guardini, who believed that clarity of conscience and strength of character are not keeping up with this increase in technological ideological power. In an earlier encyclical letter, Pope Benedict XVI summarized these two dimensions that we encounter in the reflections of our authors, the ambivalent dimension and the absence of ethical progress along with technological progress: »The ambiguity of progress becomes evident. Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph 3:16; 2 Cor 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world.«⁴⁹ Guardini and Ellul deem this terrifying progress in evil and the threat to man and the world to be the chaos facing the modern man, and postmodernists today. The solution lies in what Ellul considers the *recognition of God's transcendence*, and Guardini *the importance of the religious element*. For Pope Benedict XVI, it is summarized by a fundamental orientation, in which reason is not excluded but becomes an aid to the contemplation of God and responsible action in the world. Indeed, »scientific discoveries (...) and the possibilities of technological intervention seem so advanced as to force a choice between two types of reasoning: reason open to transcendence or reason closed within immanence. We are presented

⁴⁸ CV, 14.

⁴⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi. Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope* (30. XI. 2007), no. 22. Available from: http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html (Accessed: 2. X. 2020).

with a clear either/or.«⁵⁰ It is clear that the hermetic nature of instrumental rationality in its ostensible omnipotence can only lead to the aforementioned chaos and even greater danger. Man, in his encounter with technology, manifests the depth of his longing and discovers his inner self,⁵¹ which can be a reflection of ethical values but, unfortunately can be woven of factors that are destructive to himself and the environment.

4.2. Pope Francis and the technocratic paradigm

Pope Francis, in the wake of his predecessor, emphasizes the ambiguity and power of technology in the encyclical letter *Laudato si'*. The third chapter, entitled *The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis*, deals specifically with the topic through the so-called *technocratic paradigm*. The Pope's statement corresponds significantly to what has been stated until now: »Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.«⁵² This statement testifies to the unchanging state of the technological mentality because power is still subject to the logic of profit and economic growth, while often devoid of growth in responsibilities, values, conscience and, ultimately, ethics and spirituality. Francis finds a fundamental and even deeper problem in the power of the technocratic paradigm, in the way »humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm.«⁵³ Like Guardini, Ellul and Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis concludes that technology has brought us to a crossroads: »Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads. We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change: steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, aeroplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies.«⁵⁴ However, the moral maturity to curb the frightening dimensions of the technocratic paradigm is still lacking.

⁵⁰ CV, 74.

⁵¹ Cf. Tonči MATULIĆ, *Razvoj narodâ u perspektivi razvoja bioetike. Od zastrañjenja vjere u napredak do obnove kršćanske nade*, in: Stjepan BALOBAN – Gordan ĆRPIĆ (ed.), *Ljubav u istini u društvenim pitanjima*, Zagreb, 2012, 198.

⁵² POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato si'*. *Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (24. V. 2015), no. 104. Available from: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (Accessed: 5. IX. 2020), (Hereinafter: LS).

⁵³ LS, 106.

⁵⁴ LS, 102.

Francis's reflections on the ambivalence of the technocratic paradigm are in line with those of his predecessor, Benedict XVI, thereby implicitly continuing Ellul's theological and ethical legacy. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Guardini has occupied an enviable position in this document and provided the main guidelines regarding Pope Francis' reflections on technological power. Guardini's work, a focus of this research, was referred to eight times. This fact alone testifies to the influence and relevance of Guardini's thinking in the contemporary context of the growth of technological power.

Let us try to point out several forms of the manifestation of this technocratic paradigm, through which some attempt to become masters with the aid of technology.⁵⁵ The first is the monitoring of others using various devices with tracking chips that report a person's whereabouts. The most basic means for achieving this are mobile devices. Furthermore, there is a homogenization of information in order to achieve uniformity of thought, i.e., control public opinion. Technology not only makes it possible to know what another person is thinking but implicitly and efficiently imposes upon him what he should be thinking. The algorithmic management of man and society creates a digital environment and mentality that encourage a certain type of behaviour, i.e., the acceptance of what we would not ordinarily find acceptable under normal and natural circumstances. In this way, technology becomes a hermeneutic key to the interpretation, understanding and experience of existence. The third and significant form of management is the construction of stereotypes,⁵⁶ i.e., categories that identify and leave the impression of knowing and planning certain behaviours in people. The fourth form is the impact of television on the emotional mood, via various forms of advertising, propaganda and brain washing that influence human emotion. We find the last form in the health insurance card, which makes it very easy to monitor and perhaps even violate a person's existential intimacy. If we add the possibility of genome intervention and reprogramming, then all human reproduction is under attack. These forms, as well as others, simply confirm that the technocratic paradigm encroaches not only upon the materiality of the world, not only upon animal biology, but upon humanity. In this way, we would have a world of human beings of whom at least a part had lost a sense of personhood, i.e., an individual's

⁵⁵ Cf. Odilon-Gbènoukpo SINGBO, Vidljiva i nevidljiva moć tehnologije očitovana u tehnokratskoj paradigmi, 94–96.

⁵⁶ Cf. Denis FAÏCK, Le transhumanisme ou l'appropriation de la personne?, in: Odile HARDY (ed.), *Le transhumanisme: Homo Novus ou fin de l'homme? Regards chrétiens*, Paris, 2017, 27.

freedom, autonomy, absolute value and uniqueness.⁵⁷ Technologies, with all the benefits they bring us, nevertheless require vigilance so that man does not become degraded. This is possible through what has been pointed out by Guardini, Ellul and Benedict XVI, the summary of which is in Pope Francis's invitation to find »a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.«⁵⁸

Concluding thoughts: A comparative summary

There is no doubt that Guardini's and Ellul's philosophical and theological views, despite their different religious affiliations and the passage of time since postmodernism, have a prophetic dimension. The actualization of their ideas helps us continue where they left off, as Popes Benedict XVI and Francis did. The postmodern dream of anthropocentric technology imbued with liberal subjectivity, detached from a supernatural foothold and indifference »toward the divine being«⁵⁹ puts us at a crossroads and a test of our humanity. Increased power owing to the unbridled growth of technology, for which the young generation has not necessarily been trained, has put human society in constant danger of violence, whether physical or virtual. There is no doubt that technology has an anthropological dimension, and that man has a technological dimension. These two realities are complementary. However, a problem arises when the technicalization of every reality prevails, all the way to man's enslavement by technology and loss of freedom. This is manifested in the ambiguity of technological autonomy, owing to which man, desiring to achieve absolute autonomy and control over events, puts himself in danger because he loses control over the sacral power engraved in technology. This loss is due to neglect of the crucial importance of the life of the »inner self« (Rom 7:22, Eph 3:16) and »spiritual person« (1 Cor 2:15), i.e., awareness of being created in God's image and all the spiritual and moral implications thereof.

This study of a dialogue between two authors helps us to summarize the congruence of their thoughts in order to facilitate the penetration and actualization of their contents in the postmodern context of miniature and increasingly powerful technologies, artificial intelligence and transhumanist ideology.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁵⁸ LS, 111.

⁵⁹ Milan GALOVIĆ, *Uvod u filozofiju znanosti i tehnike. Znanost i tehnika u razdoblju nagovještaja povijesnog obrata*, Zagreb, 1997, 160.

	Romano Guardini	Jacques Ellul
Ambiguity	Technology is a kingdom divided in itself: half positive possibilities and half the destruction of everything, even man himself.	Technology is neither good, bad nor neutral but rather has internal determinism that can lead to good, as well as to evil. It is difficult to distinguish between beneficial and destructive consequences.
Sacrality	The phenomenon of profane religiosity that poses a danger to man. The desacralisation of nature and culture lead to the sacralisation of human autonomy, wrested away from God. Consequences: emptiness and depersonalization of power.	Technology as a new expression of man's sacral power. Desacralisation of nature leads to the sacralisation of means, i.e., technology and enslavement to it.
The Position of God	Aided by technological power, the relationship with God was severed.	Technological power has supplanted the power of the Creator.
The Human Condition	Polar opposites. Technology is manifested as a demonic power that leads to enslavement, artificiality, emptiness and instability.	Under the influence of power, by using technology man actually serves it and, thus, becomes enslaved by his own inventions.
Freedom	The choice between a reinstatement of the religious element for a life of dignity or surrender to the »inhumane« logic of power.	The choice between God's liberating transcendence or enslavement that leads to chaos.
Ethical Principles	The ethical power of humility as a responsible power over power itself. Service is the immaculate dimension of true power that knows how to set boundaries. The power of nonpower, i.e., the cross, is more powerful than technological power.	The ethic of nonpower as renunciation of the use of destructive power. Nonpower is not a sign of powerlessness but rather of responsibility and the Spirit of true life.
Other specifics of Technological Power	<p>–Rationality: Supplants spontaneity, personality and »irrationality«.</p> <p>–Artificiality: Subjugates and even destroys nature.</p> <p>–Automatism: Based on <i>a priori</i> criteria of effectiveness. 1</p>	

	<p>–Self-aggrandizement: Constant creation of oneself, growth and technical progress as the universal point of reference.</p> <p>–Uniqueness: Creation of a homogenous reality imbued with good and bad technologies.</p> <p>–Chain of continuity: Previous technology makes future technology possible, while future technology arises from previous technology, and thus there is no free choice of technology.</p> <p>–Universality: Extending to all areas and states, it has become a global reality through the uniformization of society that threatens to obliterate ancient cultures and civilizations.</p> <p>–Autonomy: By its very nature, it is intrinsically free of political, economic, moral or spiritual norms, having imposed itself on everyone owing to its efficiency. Technology has become an independent and sacred power that decides what is right and wrong.</p>	
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Sažetak

FILOZOFSKO-TEOLOŠKI DOPRINOS ROMANA GUARDINIJA I JACQUESA ELLULA RAZUMIJEVANJU TEHNIČKE MOĆI

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Rastuća dinamika kojom je obilježena suvremena tehnologija izvor je moći koja se očituje na raznim područjima ljudskog života i djelatnosti. Mnogi kršćanski teolozi i filozofi posvetili su svoja promišljanja tehničkoj moći kojom čovjek ne uspijeva odgovorno

upravljati za vlastito dobro i za dobro prirode. Ovaj rad nastoji prikazati podudarnosti filozofsko-teoloških promišljanja dvojice autora za razumijevanje tehničke moći: jedan katolik Romano Guardini, a drugi protestant Jacques Ellul. Rad je podijeljen u četiri glavna dijela. U prvom dijelu se kratko razmatra tehničko-društvena situacija nakon Drugog svjetskog rata. Temeljna promišljanja dvojice autora usmjerena su na konstataciju o izbacivanju Boga iz društveno-kulturnih zbivanja. Takvo stanje uzrokuje nadmoć tehnike čija je ključna karakteristika ambivalentnost. U drugom dijelu promišlja se o novoj dimenziji koju autori primjećuju kod pristupa tehničkoj zbilji, a to je njegova sakralizacija koja rađa desakralizacijom prirode i instrumentalizacijom osobe. Treći dio rada bavi se mogućim rješenjima za preživljavanje čovjeka u borbi s tehničkom moći. Guardini nalazi mogući izlaz u etičkoj moći poniznosti i služenja, a Ellul ističe teološku etiku ne-moći kao slobodno odricanje od korištenja moći. U četvrtom dijelu se istražuje recepcija teoloških misli autora u učiteljstvu dvojice pape Benedikta XVI. i Franje. U fokus su stavljena dva njihova dokumenta koja se izričito bave temom tehničke moći. Dok jedan ističe ambivalentnost tehnike, drugi promišlja o logici tehnokratske paradigme.

Ključne riječi: tehnička moć, teološka etika, moderna, religiozni element, profanost, sakralnost, moć nad moći, ne-moć, služenje.