

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

ROMANO GUARDINI ON TECHNOLOGY, EXISTENCE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON:
AN INTRODUCTORY EXPOSITION AND APPRAISAL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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PREVIEW

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GRADUATE STUDIES

This dissertation of James A Lamberti entitled "Romano Guardini on Technology, Existence and the Human Person: An Introduction, Exposition and Appraisal" submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

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To those who proudly saw me begin this project and remain present at its completion:
my wife Teresa and my children: Regina, Robert, Sarah, Katherine, Mary, and the one
who saw the beginning and still remains present in spirit, Edith.

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study strives to provide a philosophically critical, historical investigation and qualitative exposition regarding the observations and thought of Romano Guardini in order to suggest an answer to the question of ‘*what it means to be human in an age of technology*’. Guardini’s concerns and observations are presented as valid and pertinent to the current age. As such, this study investigates the manner in which the continued development and use of technology tend to affect the nature of man and man’s perspective towards himself in attempting to identify any basic sense of order and meaning within this contemporary world. This study also identifies and draws upon several thinkers whose thought may be understood as influencing Guardini, or who have more recently addressed similar concerns regarding the relation of man to modern technology as central aspects of a current, ongoing conversation. It remains however, that the primary content of this investigation is to provide a focused introduction and interpretation of Romano Guardini’s various concerns regarding the effects of technology on human existence. Guardini perceived existence through the lens of a singularly Christian *Weltanschauung*. This study presents Guardini’s concerns and observations about mankind as valid and relevant for serious consideration by both Christian and non-Christian in the present global culture. The observations of several thinkers such as Gerald Phelan, Frederick Wilhelmsen, and St. John Paul II are drawn upon to provide support and counterpoint to the overall investigation and insights that emerge from Guardini’s philosophical and theological anthropology of man.

Forward

An Biographical Introduction to Romano Guardini

Romano Guardini (1885-1968) was born in the town of Verona, Italy. His father was to take the family and immigrate a year later to the city of Mainz, Germany. Guardini as an Italian-born Catholic priest, and having eventually obtained German citizenship, subsequently was to spend most of his life in Germany up until his death in 1968. Having lived through two world wars and their subsequent aftermath, his observations remain a rich source for this present age as they are some of the earliest treatments regarding the effects of technology on man in relation to himself and to his relationship to the rest of existence. The effects of these ever more newly developed technologies as they seemed to proliferate with an internal impetus of their own became a continued cause for concern that he was to revisit in various contexts throughout his life. It is noteworthy that Guardini never accepted a chair of either philosophy or theology during his lifetime, though he excelled and was interested in both. Guardini from 1923 on taught as a Professor of *Religionsphilosophie und Katholische Weltanschauung* at the University of Berlin in 1939, where he remained until subsequently dismissed by the Third Reich. He remained in Berlin during W.W.II and continued to write and lecture at St. Canisius, a local church, until 1941 when the Reich prohibited him from giving any public address. It was only after the end of the war that Guardini accepted a post as professor of *Religionsphilosophie und Christliche Weltanschauung* at the University of Munich where he would remain for the rest of his academic career which was to last until 1962.

Just as Guardini did not belong to a single University department over the course of his lifetime, Guardini's writings themselves are observations on various aspects of human experience that remain as an example of what "the humanities" should be understood to truly represent. The "humanities" study man from different perspectives that furnish a different position towards whatever the "whole of man" is, as experienced. While in a sense independent and valid, each of the disciplines within the humanities cannot claim to provide a complete picture regarding man and the human condition in and by itself. As such, each discipline within the humanities is a source that should be considered in any attempt at achieving a more unified and complete understanding of man and his known world. This attempt at a unified and true understanding of existence is the undertaking that is reflected in Guardini's observations on technology, the world, personhood, and the true source of the dignity and humanity of man.

Guardini has thus far, primarily been recognized for his contributions in the area of Catholic liturgical reform and theology. His more well-known works revolve around strict theological themes. Along with other contributors such as Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Martin Buber, many of Guardini's observations and concerns were to serve as precursors of issues that were taken up by the ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church as it was convened by Pope John XXIII in 1960, more commonly known as Vatican II. Guardini's influence in this area is related but not the direct focus of this study. Late in his life he was offered the rank of Cardinal which he refused to accept. Upon leaving the University of Munich in 1962, Romano Guardini's health deteriorated and he died in 1968. He is buried in

It remains important that in attempting to understand Guardini's thought on a subject, that it must be understood that his Christian faith as promulgated by the magisterium of the Catholic Church, underlies his observations and concerns regarding what it means to be human in an age

of technology. Finally, it should be noted that no single work exhausts Guardini's relevant observations on technology or on the personhood of man, yet many of his works touch upon or revisit his continued attempts to provide answers to the 'anthropological question' as human existence is '*formed and in-formed*' by the continued advances and effects of modern technology.

PREVIEW

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I wish to offer my humble thanks and lasting gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee without whose direction, patience and moral support this project would have failed to reach completion. Foremost, I want to thank my mentor, Dr. Daniel Cowdin from Salve Regina University, and my readers, Dr. Clark Merrill from Salve Regina University and Dr. James Keating from Providence College.

PREVIEW

Note on Translations:

This author assumes all responsibility for any inaccuracies found to exist in quotations or citations as referenced and translated from several works of Guardini not yet available to the author in English.

PREVIEW

Part I

PREVIEW

Introduction

Basic Considerations regarding Guardini

The primary, humanistic perspective of this study is concerned with the thought of Romano Guardini, best understood in the light of a Christian, philosophical and theological tradition as developed within western civilization and culture. This study maintains the view that Guardini's observations while dated in some sense, continue to remain useful towards the continued development of a contemporary, yet philosophical and theologically anthropological understanding of man himself, and in particular, regarding man in relation to his reality as continuously in-formed by technology.

Throughout the various observations regarding man as a person, technology, and culture within the thought of Romano Guardini, there exists much that may assist in providing a greater and more accurate understanding regarding the effects of technology upon the human condition in the contemporary world. Guardini however, does raise the possibility that as technology shapes all that is, that something vital to human existence is being lost. Guardini specifically raises this question in "*Letters from Lake Como*" which is treated at some length in a subsequent section of this study. Importantly, Guardini questions any attitude or assumption that technological progress, including any specific technology, automatically provides an improvement for humankind. In a word, Guardini asks if a disjunction exists between what man is able to accomplish by the combined efforts of the human imagination, the human will, and human techniques that promise positive benefits for humankind, yet ultimately serves to impede man's search for meaning that is cause for concern.

The main topic of this dissertation is to introduce, explicate, and interpret, but not necessarily to endorse any specific conclusions of Guardini or those of others whose views, observations and concerns regarding what identified as a different and “new technological age”. This explication and interpretation attempts to enjoin and continue the conversation regarding technology that Guardini, along with other of his contemporaries began and which Guardini primarily frames the search for the truth about human existence. The essential nature of this conversation becomes evident with Guardini's preliminary remarks about “human destiny and what we must do” that are required regarding an attempt to engage in any serious discussion on a given topic. Guardini attempts to provide a discussion regarding surrounding our personal human existence. This is a topic that he feels is singularly different from most topics due to the content matter that is being considered. It is important to understand the distinctions that are made by Guardini when entering into any discussion regarding the current plight and ultimate concerns regarding all of creation: especially humankind.

It is natural for a man to tell others what he believes he knows. For this purpose, it is necessary that he should have real knowledge, and that he should present that knowledge clearly. His hearer, however, must be prepared to listen simply and attentively, to discuss, and to learn. Then there is another kind of address, in which the subject is furnished not by the speaker's knowledge alone, but also by his personal convictions, in the special and deep sense of the word. Consequently, he will say things of which we can really be ‘convinced,’ as we can of some truth which touches us nearly. The living personality enters into this conviction, or it would not be one. In an address of this nature, then it is essential that the personality of the speaker should be actually present in his utterance. In the case of the hearer, moreover, it is essential that he should know that he is confronted by a personal utterance, and that he himself should possess a personal attitude—that is: reverence and willingness for serious discussion. Finally, there is a third form of address. In this a man no longer merely presents his knowledge, nor does he treat exclusively of his convictions; instead he talks about ‘what we must do.’ It is then a question of human destiny... that ‘Something’ whose supreme religious expression lies in the words “salvation of the soul.” For an address of this nature, earnestness and responsibility are not sufficient...*there must be a*

*contract between the speaker and his hearer, in virtue of which they really desire to deal together with the subject of “what we must do.”*¹ (Italics mine)

These requirements and possibilities for most forms of teaching and learning according to Guardini seem worth remembering within the context of this study. In the second sense of address mentioned above, Guardini's observations are presented as observations furnished by his personal convictions, which require an understanding and the necessary consideration of Guardini's methodology and his Catholic Christian understanding of scholastic metaphysics. This is true in that Guardini ultimately would choose to emphasize and retain an affinity towards following the perspectives of Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure and Aquinas, in the development of his own perspective towards Christian theology and the truth regarding man as situated in creation. These considerations serve as an underlying foundation to this investigation, which attempts to explicate and assess the thought and current concerns of Guardini for humankind:

We live in an age that has been laid waste. The things of the spirit and the things of salvation have been made homeless... We have forgotten that the things of the spirit have a peculiar and exacting distinction of their own; and that before we can grasp them we must comply with certain conditions. Consequently, the various affairs of the spiritual world at different times require different modes of utterance and reception. They require an inner Space of a different kind, in which that utterance and reception can take place. We are living in an age in which the degradation of the spirit has become universal and no longer even particularly remarkable... A lecture presenting something known, to hearers ready for knowledge, is not here in question; nor is the lecture merely the exposition of a conviction before men who are prepared to accord it respectful hearing and discussion. We [Guardini and his audience] are dealing rather with the fact that towards an understanding of the anxiety for our inmost existence, notes are compared on the problems which touch that existence and its salvation. And there is one final point: We are going to deal with several problems of the inner life:

1. Romano Guardini, *Conscience*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1932), 17-19.

that is, with moral and religious problems. There is no intention, however, of presenting an ethical system, but merely of indicating a fruitful starting-point-one among others. If here, and in this context, certain positive moral teachings of Christianity are not specifically mentioned, they are not thereby excluded, but rather expressly take for granted.²

Guardini's observations on man, culture, the environment, and society, in relation to technology invite continued reflection into the present. Guardini at times seems to possess an almost prophetic vision of what it might mean for a person to be "human" in an age of technology. There is anticipation that Guardini's views and concerns regarding the status of human nature and the implications of technology serve as positive additions towards a more accurate, complete understanding of man's evolving and ever-changing situation. This seems evident in that they remain to be topics of consideration and refinement as developed by various thinkers who have followed him. This study will, at times, reference several of these thinkers, and include their insights, when it is felt they will lend clarification to not only Guardini's own thoughts, but to the contemporary problems of mankind which he identified as areas of concern.

2. Romano Guardini, *Conscience*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1932), 17-19.

Comments on Methodology

The methodology of this interdisciplinary study utilizes, when appropriate, a philosophical, and theological approach, as well an historical exposition, in order to provide a qualitative analysis of the thought of Romano Guardini. The combination of these methods has been dictated by the breadth and range of Guardini's thought related to the human condition. Since Guardini's observations received impetus from what he identified as the implications of past and contemporary attitudes towards the general phenomenon of technology from various sources, this combining of perspectives is seen as the most appropriate regarding Guardini's legitimate concerns for the human person now and for the future. Thus, this study strives to provide a focused interpretation of Guardini that is the result of assimilating what are pertinent selections from the various writings of Guardini on technology and what it means to be human. These selections also place Guardini in a comparative conversation with the ideas of other thinkers who have addressed similar concerns regarding the formulation of possible answers to the modern anthropological question.

Since more than half a century has passed since Guardini formulated many of these observations and concerns; this study necessarily provides an appraisal and assessment regarding their accuracy and present day relevance. As noted earlier, the methodology employed in this study approaches the history of western civilization in light of its dependency on its Christian intellectual past.

The Christian intellectual tradition functions throughout this investigation as the primary, legitimate basis and source of human wisdom regarding man and his relation to *techne* as "human making" and the accumulation of "human power." This reliance upon

Christian thought is necessarily maintained as the source and focus for the continuing direction of this examination of the selected writings of Romano Guardini. This study will include the observations of several other thinkers as they are deemed related to this study, whether Christian or non-Christian, yet seemingly within the humanist and existentialist traditions who have contributed to the further development of a valid, though somewhat currently unpopular Christian view regarding the nature of man. This view admits that “man” is that composite being appropriately directed in this reality towards a “*telos*” that transcends the temporal reality for each individual and humankind. This view accepts the underlying assertion of the real possibility to acquire legitimate knowledge of man, by man himself, not limited to validation by the scientific method. The truth of such non-scientific knowledge, at minimum, requires consideration and reflection by human culture and society as valid in its own right. This would be in opposition to those who insist that all truth is affirmed solely upon the application of the methodology of the natural sciences which tend to dismiss all else as concepts grounded in myth, irrelevant, or the product of simple conjecture. While no one can deny the contributions of science, the claim that science is the source of all truth and knowledge is only a claim. It remains that such a claim lacks the ability for verification by the self-imposed standard of science. There remain certain elements of human knowledge and the accessibility to what is true about the “whole of man” that lie within the grasp of human reason, and for Guardini, these truths are essential to the accurate understanding of man and his relationship to all that is part of his existence.

In light of these assumptions, this study consequently includes man’s evolving understanding of self, culture, society, philosophy, religion and technology in an attempt

to establish order and meaning for man and his world as understood by Guardini. The result for Guardini is to declare that a radical re-orienting of contemporary man's overall perspective towards the world is required for man to understand, obtain, and preserve the source of any inherent dignity regarding what it means to human. This is especially true after the end of the modern world. There is a specific anticipation that this investigation will provide a firmer "clearing and ground" that will help to sustain the ultimate basis for the source of the true dignity of man. If successful, then an essential and proper orientation of man to the rest of creation will ensue as a relation that enhances and preserves human "dignitas" while providing a "telos" that guides technology to effect positive transformations in the present, for the future of the whole of human existence.³

This investigation purports also to philosophize and possibly provide a basis for increased clarity regarding any contemporary anthropological understanding of the relation between technology and the individual in society and the nature of this relation to the present technological culture. Also utilized are the thoughts of several other authors as deemed relevant to the observations put forth by Guardini in an effort to clarify and provide a viable answer to the question posed for the continued consideration by the

3. "In particular, the Council Fathers approved, precisely 40 years ago, a Declaration on the question of religious liberty, that is, the right of persons and of communities to seek the truth and to profess their faith freely. The first words that give this document its title are 'dignitatis humanae': religious liberty derives from the special dignity of the human person, who is the only one of all the creatures on this earth who can establish a free and conscious relationship with his or her Creator. 'It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will..., are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth.'" Pope Benedict XVI, *Dignitatis Humanae* (n. 2. Cf. Angelus) December 4, 2005.

Doctoral Program at Salve Regina University: “What does it mean to be human in an age of advanced technology?”

Part I is concerned with basic considerations that present Guardini, his life, and certain areas of concern regarding technology, culture and the modern world. Included in Part I is a section that provides some of Guardini’s understanding and insights regarding the relation of the humanities, technological progress and the subject of power. Part 2 provides an analysis of Guardini’s methods, man’s search for orientation in the modern world, the idea of the human person, and how it relates to the effects of technology. Part 3 provides the identification of several of Guardini’s major, Christian philosophic influences. Part 4 includes specific observations regarding the emergent effects of technology as a “formal cause” for our present and future age in relation to man and his concrete, lived existence. This section includes an ongoing discussion by various contemporary thinkers regarding several concerns regarding technology whether directly influenced or independent of Guardini. Part 5 purports to provide from a contemporary perspective, a beginning assessment of Guardini’s major concerns for humanity in terms of their continued validity and relevance for the present age and into the future.

Chapter I

Early Observations of Guardini on Technology

Guardini's initial contributions to the early conversations regarding technology are presented in a series of letters published from 1923-1925,⁴ and then collectively as *Letters from Lake Como: Explorations in Technology and the Human Race* first published in 1927. It is within these letters that Guardini identifies the effects of mechanization on society and man as the emergence of what he labels "mechanical desire". This desire being a human will which, as "isolated, understood the power of nature, which works through the machine—which itself is no more than rationality reduced to a tool".⁵

In the *End of the Modern World* (1950), Guardini outlines in a general manner, a historical treatment of different epochs as shifts between the place of man in relation to his world as well as delineating concerns regarding the human being in relation to the advance of industrialization and technology up to that time. Taken as a whole, these concerns also specify the relationship between the effects of science providing the impetus towards new technologies and how technique impacts not only the individual within western civilization, but in our global age, all humanity.

While mostly over-looked, many of Guardini's initial observations appear in his *Letters from Lake Como* (1926) and pre-date by almost 30 years the better-known treatment of technology and technique as a phenomenon in Jacques Ellul's *La Technique*

4. Romano Guardini, *Letters from Lake Como* (Michigan: Wm B. Erdmans Co., 1994), vii.

5. Ibid, 74.

(1954). The same is true regarding much of Guardini's writings as they relate to the concerns regarding technology in that they pre-date Heidegger's *Question regarding Technology* (1954). While each of these other two authors and their initial treatment of the phenomenon of technology are more recognized throughout much of academia, Guardini's observations provide another perspective for consideration. Guardini will continue to revisit some of his earlier concerns regarding man and technology in later works, most notably in his '*The End of the Modern World*', first published in German in 1950.⁶

Guardini and Ellul

In order to provide an understanding regarding the issues regarding the nature of technology in general; it is beneficial to briefly examine several thinkers contemporary to Guardini on the subject and their possible relation to Guardini as they were instrumental in presenting the initial framework of any conversation regarding the effects of technology on humanity and as their insights subsequently remain important into the present. One of the earliest and most well-known is the sociologist Jacques Ellul.

Ellul begins by stating: "Acknowledging that the technological phenomenon is a constant of human history [it must be asked if] is there anything new about its present aspect?"⁷ Does it follow from something in the past?

6. Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit: Ein Versuch zur Orientierung*, (Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag Press, 1950)

7. Jacques Ellul, *the Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Random House, 1964), 61.

Ellul's analysis regarding the characteristics of technique begins with the assertion that there are two available positions, each determined by "historical choice."

At the same time, Ellul also proposes an addendum to the second position that has the advantage of being more meaningful:

The first [position] maintains there is no more real technical innovation in the modern world than there was in the Stone Age ... It would seem, then, that technical innovations have always had the same surprising and unwelcome character for men. If we become frightened, [about a specific technological development] we are merely obeying ancestral instincts...Technology functions as an intermediary between man and his environment. [No one technology, old or new] has destroyed the human race. In opposition to this resolutely optimistic position, there is another, which maintains that we are confronted with a genuinely new phenomenon. There is nothing in common between the modern technical complex and the fragments of it which are laboriously sought out in the course of history to demonstrate that there has always been technique... there is a change of quality as a consequence of change of quantity...Technique has taken on a substance, has become a reality in itself. It is no longer merely a means and an intermediary. It is an object in itself, an independent reality with which we must reckon. [However this] characterization can be challenged because it does not rest upon deep historical experience. We may keep this in mind, but it is incomplete and not altogether convincing. It is not the intrinsic characteristics of techniques that reveal whether there have been real changes, but the characteristics of the relation between the technical phenomenon and society, the relation to the environment and for man; we must assess not the internal characteristics of a technique, but the actual situation of technique in human society.⁸

This discussion and analysis maintains that Guardini does not fully accept Ellul's formulation that there are two self-exclusive and distinct perspectives that exist regarding a legitimate understanding of the technological phenomenon. For Guardini, the phenomenon of technology does include a new radical element to the present reality of our technological age, but this newness stems in part from past attitudes regarding the unquestioned benefits of human technological progress throughout history; and that for

8. Jacques Ellul, *the Technological Society*, 61-64.