

Umberto Galimberti: A Technopessimist Philosopher?

ABSTRACT

In *Psiche e Techne*, Umberto Galimberti states that Technique has become the Absolute of the human condition. Thus, for this Italian philosopher of technology, the modern human being, living in the Age of Technology, has been reduced to the condition of a mere extension (or means) of the technical apparatus. This article aims to (1) situate Galimberti's thought within the contemporary landscape of Italian Philosophy of Technology, (2) analyze how his perspective appropriates ideas from Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Severino, and (3) discuss whether it is appropriate to consider Galimberti a technopessimist philosopher. We conclude that Galimberti acknowledges how certain human capacities (adaptation, anticipation, and imagination) can restore our condition as subjects rather than objects of technological alienation.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy of Technology. Umberto Galimberti. Technique as Absolute. Technopessimist. Age of Technique.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Philosophy of Technology (PoT) is commonly—though not unanimously—considered a relatively recent subfield of Philosophy (FRANSSEN; LOKHORST; VAN DE POEL, 2021). It is said to have originated with the publication of *Grundlinien der Philosophie der Technik* in 1877, written by Ernst Kapp (1808–1896), and institutionalized about a century later, first with the founding of the *Society for Philosophy of Technology* (1977) and then with the launch of the editorial series *Research in Philosophy of Technology* (1978) (FERRÉ, 1995, p. 9–10). However, despite having just over a hundred years of existence, the development of PoT is usually divided into at least two distinct stages: the classical phase, from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, and the empirical phase, which began around the 1980s and remains ongoing. Verbeek (2022) helps to clarify the distinction between them:

In the 1980s, the philosophy of technology also began to develop closer connections with the concrete, empirical reality of artifacts, systems, and technological processes. In order to better analyze technology, many philosophers decided that they could not rely solely on the philosophical tradition but rather on a deeper understanding of technology itself and its actual relationships with humans and society (VERBEEK, 2022, p. 35).

Fundamentally, this perspective aligns with Achterhuis's (2001, p. 6) narrative, which refers to a kind of Americanization of PoT. Its migration from Europe to the United States is said to have occurred after American philosophers—more or less direct heirs of the pragmatist tradition—began to consider that classical conceptions of technology were insufficient to explain key topics in this field of knowledge (IHDE, 1998). Thus, for instance, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) or Hans Jonas (1903–1993) would have little to contribute to discussions on the methodology of technological design or the epistemological dimension of engineering. After all, in their respective works *The Question Concerning Technology* (a lecture delivered in 1953) and *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1979), the two German philosophers were more concerned with the essence, mode of existence, or ethical issues implicated by modern Technik (MITCHAM, 1994, p. 104–105, 207; DUSEK, 2009, p. 105; CUPANI, 2016, p. 40–47).

Coeckelbergh (2019, p. 117) emphasized that PoT remained centered on a Western perspective on technology for some time. However, according to the scholar, at the turn of the 21st century, PoT gradually assumed an intercultural and transcultural stance, meaning that publications began to emerge that disseminated philosophical reflections on technology produced in countries beyond the United States and Germany, as well as continents beyond Europe and North America. This explains why, today, it is possible to access PoT research from France, China, Mexico, Brazil, Spain, Costa Rica, Chile, or Venezuela (MITCHAM, 1994).

Chiodo and Schiaffonati (2021) specifically focused on Italian PoT and identified three main areas of inquiry. First, the relationships between technology, politics, and society, which seek to understand the particularities of Western culture concerning technological development and its impacts on the economy and relationships between citizens and nations. Second, the environmental impacts of technological (or engineering) actions. Third, the legal and ethical issues raised by technology.

This study focuses on the thought of the Italian philosopher of technology Umberto Galimberti (1942–). But what justifies this choice?

Galimberti is considered one of the most important contemporary Italian philosophers, particularly due to his profound reflections on Technique (VERČ, 2012, p. 127). However, his name does not appear in international publications on PoT¹. Even more surprisingly, he is not mentioned in any of the 16 chapters of the volume *Italian Philosophy of Technology*. This is at least intriguing, given that the collection aims precisely to present to a broad audience “the contributions of Italian philosophers who have produced reflections on technology in recent decades” (CHIODO; SCHIAFFONATI, 2021, p. 1).

To address the influences and philosophical contributions of this Italian thinker, this study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents Galimberti's biography and the general outlines of his thought, highlighting his thesis of **Technique as Absolute**; Section 3 explores the influences of Friedrich Nietzsche (3.1), Martin Heidegger (3.2), and Emanuele Severino (3.3) in the development of this thesis, analyzing the impact of technology on social, political, cultural, moral, and ethical aspects of life; and the Conclusion argues that Galimberti's PoT does not adopt a **technopessimistic** perspective, despite his characterization of the **Age of Technique** as a period of technical domination over humanity. In this sense, Galimberti's thought diverges from those three major influences on his work *Psiche e Techne: L'uomo nell'età della tecnica* [Psyche and Techne: Man in the Age of Technology], first published in 1999.

2 THE TECHNIQUE AS ABSOLUTE: THE AGE OF TECHNIQUE ACCORDING TO GALIMBERTI

The philosopher and psychoanalyst Umberto Galimberti was born in Monza, in the Lombardy region of Italy. He graduated in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Milan in 1965, also attending the University of Basel. In 1963, in Switzerland, he met Karl Jaspers, who encouraged him to investigate the interconnections between psychopathology and philosophy. Subsequently, he became a student-disciple of Jaspers, dedicating himself to the translation and dissemination, in Italian, of works by the German-Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher². Since 2015, he has been an emeritus professor at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is also a regular member of the International Association for Analytical Psychology, which plays an important role in the studies, development, and international dissemination of Analytical Psychology. Currently, he writes columns for the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on topics related to philosophy, psychology, and cultural and social issues. He has published several works, some of which can be read in French, Spanish, German, Greek, Japanese, Slovenian, Serbian, and Portuguese³ (GALIMBERTI, 2017).

Galimberti's reflections on the technical phenomenon can be found in different texts: *Heidegger, Jaspers e il tramonto dell'Occidente* [Heidegger, Jaspers and the Decline of the West] (1975); and *Invito al pensiero di Heidegger* [Invitation to Heidegger's Thought] (1986). In these works, the Italian philosopher presents the thoughts of Heidegger and Jaspers, exploring their fundamental concepts and the cultural and philosophical changes that occurred in the West during the 20th century. He also addresses Heidegger's thinking as fundamental to contemporary

philosophical thought about technique. However, Galimberti's most relevant work for PoT seems to be *Psiche e Techne – The Man in the Age of Technique* (1999), in which Cera (2017), for example, found arguments supporting the perspective of modern man's adaptation to the technical system, previously proposed by Jacques Ellul (1912-1994). This extensive book, translated and published in Portuguese in 2006, has even influenced Brazilian researchers such as Azambuja (2017; 2022), Soares (2020), Artica, Almida, and Ghedin (2023).

Azambuja (2017), Azambuja, Diehl, and Chaves (2022), as well as Artica, Almida, and Ghedin (2023), seem to agree that one of the central themes of *Psiche e Techne* is the thesis according to which technique has become an **Absolute** of human condition. This means that, much more than tangible artifacts, technique consists of the form of existence of modern human beings. In the **Age of Technique**, technical means have taken the place of ends, and in this sense, they have removed the human being from his position as a subject, transforming him into an object. Therefore, in the **Age of Technique**, individuals have been transformed into an extension of the technological apparatus. The following excerpts clarify this position of the author:

'Absolute' means free from any bond, therefore, from any horizon of ends, from any production of meaning, from all limits and conditioning. This prerogative, which man first attributes to nature, and then to God, is now reserved not for himself but for the world of his machines [...] man becomes decisively inferior, as well as unconscious of his own inferiority (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 16).

[...] an absolute that presents itself as a universe of means, which, since it does not aim at ends but only effects, translates the supposed ends into further means for the infinite increase of its efficiency. In this 'bad infinity,' as Hegel would call it, where there are no more acts or objects that are not 'means,' something only has 'value' if it is 'good for something else,' and thus the ultimate objectives, the purposes, which in the pre-technical age regulated human actions and gave them meaning, appear in the age of technique as absolutely 'senseless' (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 788).

In the age of technique, which begins when the universe of means has no ends in view, the relationship is reversed, in the sense that man is no longer a subject alienated and objectified by capitalist production but rather a product of technological alienation, which organizes itself as the subject and makes man its predicate [...] Existing as the predicate of the technical apparatus, which positions itself as absolute, man is no longer able to perceive himself as 'alienated' [...] he translates his alienation into the apparatus, identifying himself with the apparatus" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 18).

The inversion of the subject-object relationship, in which "man becomes a product of technological alienation" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 447-448), is crucial to Galimberti's analysis. In this context arises the technical provocation, in which "man ceases to be a subject alienated by capitalist production to become a product of technological alienation, identifying himself with the apparatus" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 448). This metamorphosis redefines the meaning of **Absolute**, "now reserved for the world of machines, depriving man of his place as a conscious subject" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 621).

Thus, Galimberti emphasizes that in the **Age of Technique**, the human being, by "existing as a predicate of the technical apparatus, loses the ability to perceive his own alienation, translating it into complete identification with the apparatus"

(GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 638-639). This condition of technical slavery, in which the human being unconsciously submits to the logic of technique as “**Absolute**” (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 646), is emblematic of a technical nihilism that demands profound philosophical reflection on “the role and impact of technique on human essence” (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 822). The following section points out thinkers who influenced Galimberti in constructing his thesis of the **Absolute** of technique, with emphasis on aspects of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche (1884-1900), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Emanuele Severino (1929-2020), which compose Galimberti's proposal that we live in the **Age of Technique**.

3 TECHNICAL SLAVERY, TECHNICAL PROVOCATION, AND TECHNICAL NIHILISM

Psiche e Techne is based on an extensive number of theoretical sources, ranging from classical authors (including Hesiod, Parmenides, Euclid, Saint Augustine, Giordano Bruno, René Descartes, Galileo Galilei, Thomas Hobbes, Goethe, G. W. F. Hegel, D. Hume, I. Kant, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx) to contemporary thinkers (such as Émile Durkheim, B. F. Skinner, M. Horkheimer, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Popper, Günter Anders, Thomas Kuhn, among others). Indeed, as can be observed from the aforementioned list of authors, Galimberti's text contains passages and arguments from various fields of knowledge (Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, Literature, Natural Sciences, etc.). Of course, not all the names cited by the Italian thinker are considered fundamental to the PoT—which does not mean that they are irrelevant to this field of knowledge. This is the case, for example, of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Karl Jaspers (1883–1969). Neither of them (at least so far) is treated as canonical for the PoT; at most, they have a rather discreet presence in compendiums or anthologies (SCHARFF; DUSEK, 2014). However, this does not imply that Freud's and Jaspers's works are philosophically sterile when it comes to reflections on technology (HOLOWCHAK, 2010). Galimberti himself seems to agree with this conclusion, as he refers to writings by these two authors to discuss seminal themes for the PoT, such as the origin of the human-artifact relationship and the very meaning of technique.

Galimberti cites almost thirty of Freud's works in his 1999 book. The Viennese physician and neurologist appears, for example, to support the Galimbertian idea that we transfer to our relationship with technical devices a lost sense of wholeness. Specifically, this is a hypothesis presented by the father of Psychoanalysis in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In this 1929 text, Freud states that, in the past, individuals' psychic lives experienced a total communion with their environment. This primary intimacy with the whole would have been lost over time, but not the longing for wholeness—which, according to the Italian thinker, would be realized in the products of technical activity. Similarly, Galimberti examines several (more than ten) texts by Jaspers, though his reading of *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man* (1958) deserves more attention. As is well known, one of the central themes of this lecture by Jaspers is the assertion that the meaning of technique is given by the unity of environmental shaping with human existence's objectives. However, the German-Swiss philosopher and psychiatrist continues, the ultimate objectives of these models lose their meaning once tools become increasingly independent of human activities. It seems to be from this that Galimberti derives the idea that, in the **Age of Technique**, means have surpassed

the true end of technique, to the point where they become **Absolute** ends themselves.

However, the author of *Psiche e Techne* also refers to thinkers who are widely recognized as central to the PoT. In Karl Marx (1818–1883), for instance, Galimberti finds the foundation to assert that, just as Roman slaves were bound by the shackles of their owners, and wage workers by the shackles of capitalism, in the **Age of Technique**, the worker is bound “by those chains that are the works of his mind and his hands, which, while prescribed by the rationality of the system, seem entirely natural” (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 647). Thus, Galimberti draws from the German thinker to conclude that the horizon of functionality would be insurmountable because the essence of technique lies in the procedures prescribed by technical devices and, as such, they are essential conditions for life. Another important name in the PoT to whom Galimberti refers is Arnold Gehlen (1904–1976). From him, the Italian philosopher finds reasons to claim that the human-machine relationship can be inverted. Thus, it would be possible to “dissolve the humanist premise, because where technology, with its autonomy, does not merely oppose man but is capable of integrating man into the technical apparatus, what is created is a man-machine system” (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 538). Specifically, Galimberti extracts this idea from *Anthropologische Ansicht der Technik [Technology from an Anthropological Perspective]*. In this work, published in 1965, it is stated that the direction of actions passes to the machine, and human behaviors, therefore, become reduced to adjustable parts of this machine.

As we have seen, Freud, Jaspers, Marx, and Gehlen appear as primary sources of Galimbertian philosophy. Undoubtedly, these are influences that deserve further investigation. However, the following section aims to identify how the ideas of three other philosophers underpin the central thesis of *Psiche e Techne*. Specifically, the goal is to show how Galimberti’s idea of **Technique as Absolute** draws upon the concepts of technical slavery, technical provocation, and technical nihilism, as defended, respectively, by Friedrich Nietzsche (1884–1900), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), and Emanuele Severino (1929–2020).

3.1 Friedrich Nietzsche and Technical Slavery

The concept of freedom holds a prominent place in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1884–1900), as shown by Oaklander (1984). Guay (2002) points out that one of the philosopher’s positions on the subject is the idea that freedom would be an attribute of an elite. This is evident, for example, in *The Greek State*, a Nietzschean essay that addresses the Greek experience of slavery. As we read in this text, included in *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books*:

For there to be a broader, deeper, and more fertile ground where art can develop, the vast majority must submit as slaves to the service of a minority, exceeding the measure of individual needs and the inevitable efforts for survival. It is at their expense, through their extra labor, that the privileged class must see itself freed from the struggle for existence, so as to generate and satisfy a new world of needs. From what has been said, we must concede, as an echo of a cruel truth, that slavery belongs to the essence of a culture: certainly, with this truth, there remains no doubt about the absolute value of existence. (NIETZSCHE, 1996, p. 47-48).

As seen in the passage above, Nietzsche suggests that "slavery belongs to the essence of a culture," meaning that freedom is not a universal condition. On the contrary, it would be reserved only for those who, in the quotation, are described as the "privileged class⁴." The excerpt also shows that, for Nietzsche, every human achievement of historical relevance has required a significant degree of deprivation of freedom. It is precisely from this explanation of the Nietzschean notion of **non-freedom** as a cultural phenomenon that Galimberti assesses the condition of human subjugation in the **Age of Technique**.

The Italian philosopher builds upon Nietzsche's idea that all human cultures experience some form of **non-freedom**: "Therefore, not only Greek culture but all culture, including the most advanced, hides behind the image of a successful humanity the non-freedom of men as its condition." (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 653). Galimberti then transposes the issue to the domain of the relationship between freedom and technology. He argues that contemporary society is so complex that certain human limitations may be imperceptible to individuals and concludes that, behind the apparent freedom provided by technology, there is a form of submission to technical rationality.

Freedom, as indicated by the Greeks and by Nietzsche, explains, in its cruelty, the violent matrix of our history and the false deception of the Hegelian solution, which resolves the concretely existing non-freedom into the abstract freedom of the human race. This non-freedom is not, in fact, as Hegel considers it, a typical feature of a historical formation such as that of ancient Greece [...], but this type of non-freedom is a *constant of that anonymous* will that we find at the base of all forms of power that forge organizations and apparatuses [...] (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 653).

Galimberti adopts Nietzsche's notion of **concealed slavery** to consider the **Absolute** of technology. This means that the context of technical evolution implies a relationship of submission that affects human freedom. In other words, the freedom provided by technology may be deceptive, as it offers only an apparent autonomy. The **Age of Technique**, in a hidden manner, entails subtle forms of subjugation, thus challenging the traditional notion of freedom. It becomes clear that *Psiche e Techne* presents a critical perspective on the relationship between freedom and technology. The book suggests that technology can increase freedom, but this process can only be experienced within the technical apparatus itself. Therefore, the experience of this freedom would be "proportional to the levels of competence within the mechanisms of the apparatus itself" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 666). To substantiate this idea, Galimberti draws on Nietzsche's thought, particularly the notion of non-true freedom, which the German philosopher referred to as **concealed slavery**.

3.2 Martin Heidegger and Technical Provocation

In *The Overcoming of Metaphysics* (1936–1946), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) addresses the complex relationship between human will and technology. He highlights, particularly in section XXVII of *Essays and Conferences*, how the will, once linked to technology, exerts a comprehensive and sometimes detrimental influence on the Earth:

Only the will that, everywhere, installs itself in technology exhausts the Earth to the point of depletion, abuse, and the mutation into the artificial. Technology forces the Earth to break the mature circle of its possibility to

reach what is neither possible nor, therefore, even impossible. Technical claims and devices have enabled the success of many discoveries and inventions. But this does not in any way prove that technological achievements have made even the impossible possible (HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 85).

For Heidegger, then, technical action does not produce the impossible, although it reveals truths that would otherwise remain hidden. This is, in fact, one of the most notable aspects of Heidegger's influential reflection on the essence of *Technik*⁵. As the philosopher from *Schwarzwald* wrote in "The Question Concerning Technology":

Technique is a mode of revealing. Technique essentializes itself in the realm where revealing and uncovering happen, where *alétheia* occurs. [...] *Téchne* is a mode of *aletheíein*. It reveals what does not produce itself and is not yet present, and which, for this reason, can appear and be noticed, now in one way, now in another. [...] The decisive element in *téchne*, therefore, does not consist in making and handling, nor in employing means, but in the aforementioned revealing; as such, but not as mere preparation, *téchne* is a bringing forth (HEIDEGGER, 2007, p. 381).

Galimberti follows this idea that the essence of technology involves the unveiling of truth through the provocation of nature. This provocation, initiated by scientific inquiry, consists of calling forth the transformation of nature (already conceived as something at humanity's disposal): "Called forth by technical production, nature becomes a background at our disposal" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 547). In this way, following Heidegger, Galimberti argues that nature becomes a source of hidden truths that must be uncovered through technical action. For the Italian philosopher, ultimately, the perception of technology as provocation is fundamental to "helping nature in its productive action and thus reestablishing truth as unveiling" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 547). However, while Galimberti agrees with Heidegger's view that techno-scientific activity seeks to "discover hidden potentialities" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 549), he disagrees with at least two points defended by the author of *Being and Time*.

Galimberti believes that humanity, through technique, can make the impossible possible. The following excerpt from *Psiche e Techne* illustrates this divergence from Heidegger's philosophy of technique:

As mere unveiling of preexisting possibilities, science and technology remain inscribed within *phýsis*, as mere expressions of its evolutionary process. But then, if understood this way, even the 'impossible' to which science and technology allude becomes 'possible' (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 550).

Another difference between the thinkers concerns the possibility of God saving humanity from the dominance of technique. To understand this issue, it is worth remembering that, for Galimberti, Judeo-Christian culture prioritizes "man's lordship over the world," thus making the domination of nature "God's will" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 549). In the Italian's reading, this tradition emphasizes doing—and action is central to the technical unveiling of truth (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 548). However, if the production of truth through technical action involves "being faithful to God's command," and if, in *Psiche e Techne*, humanity possesses the "right to dominion" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 549), one question remains: would it be possible to establish ethical limits to technical intervention in nature?

Galimberti is explicit in his response: "it will not be possible to impose any limit on technique and the effects of its expansion" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 549).

Thus, Galimberti's perspective on the interconnection between the provocation of nature, production, and technology within the Judeo-Christian tradition suggests that Christianity has served as a catalyst for technology as an **Absolute**. However, Galimberti argues that it would be illusory to believe that religious faith could serve as a means of "saving humanity from the dominance of technique" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 570) and, consequently, from the real possibility of extinction caused by technological advancements. As a result, the author of *Psiche e Techne* ultimately dismisses religious responses to the problem of technology. "Technical efficiency," the Italian philosopher states, "has long since replaced the figure of God" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 265–266). The passage below illustrates how Galimberti distances himself from Heidegger's enigmatic statement that only the invocation of a God could save⁶ us from the dangers and threats present in the technological world, in which humanity finds itself uprooted. Galimberti asserts:

[...] no "God can save us," as Heidegger's illusion suggested, because technology was born precisely from the corrosion of God's throne. Empowered by religion, which had prepared the ground to inscribe technology within a salvation project, technology led religion to its twilight, and with religion, the history that was born from the religious vision of the world (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 570).

In summary, *Psiche e Techne* aligns with the Heideggerian perspective that technology enacts a provocation of nature. By highlighting production as an explanatory element of truth, nature, and technique, Heidegger prompts reflection on the philosophical nuances of this triad. This approach has partially influenced the Italian philosopher's thought, although, as demonstrated, Galimberti rejects the idea that "religious illusions can aid in confronting the challenges imposed by the technological horizon of the **Age of Technique**" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 23–24).

3.3 Emanuele Severino and Technical Nihilism

Emanuele Severino (1929–2020) was an Italian philosopher recognized for his works and contributions to metaphysics and the philosophy of culture. Born in Brescia, Italy, Severino had a remarkable academic career and was an influential figure in the Italian philosophical landscape of the 20th and 21st centuries. He studied philosophy at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, graduating in 1951. He later continued his studies at the University of Pavia, where he earned his doctorate in 1954. Throughout his career, he taught at various universities, including the University of Pavia and the University of Veneto, and was an emeritus professor at the University of Milan.

Essenza del nichilismo [Essence of Nihilism] (1972) and *La filosofia futura [The Future Philosophy]* (1989) are among Severino's most important works. In the former, he discusses the origins of nihilism in Western philosophy and its ramifications in contemporary culture, while in the latter, he examines the relationship between nihilism, technology, and Western culture. Galimberti states:

Severino sees the nihilistic trait of Western culture, which since its origins has conceived of being as technology, that is, as the power to make all things exist and not exist. Severino writes on this subject: Western culture cannot have the capacity to establish a limit to the aggression of the entity that technology is driving ever deeper, [...] because the essence of this culture is metaphysical nihilism, of which technology is the most radical and rigorous realization (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 383).

One of the central points of this reflection concerns the assertion that modern technique represents a radical realization of metaphysical nihilism, bringing about a transformation of the traditional understanding of Being. According to Pecoraro (2020), in this perspective, the nihilism of technique consists of a faith in the transience and temporality of beings, key elements for understanding the calamitous effects of technological nihilism on human life.

Western culture cannot have the capacity to establish any limit to the aggression of the entity, which technique is driving ever deeper [...] if something is not *technikón*—that is, if it does not produce or is not produced, or does not enter the process of producing-being-produced—then it does not exist; in other words, it is nothing. *Anthropine téchne* has now been completely replaced by *theia téchne*, [...] God and modern technique are two fundamental expressions of metaphysical nihilism (SEVERINO, 1972, p. 196–197).

Galimberti refers to Severino to highlight the influence of the rise of technique on the reconfiguration of traditional perceptions of the **Absolute**, previously associated with nature and divinity. The Italian philosopher from Monza thus sought to explore how technique, as it becomes a dominant force, impacts not only the understanding of time but also nature itself. According to him, the transformation of the concept of the **Absolute** is linked to the hegemony of technique, which "emerges [...] as the disposition of the world" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 447) and brings "truth as efficiency" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 447), thereby playing a central role in the world.

Following the path opened by Severino, the author of *Psiche e Techne* understands that the nihilism of technique originates from the conception of beginning and end introduced by the Christian tradition. However, when analyzing the thesis of his Italian compatriot, Galimberti (2006, p. 315) identified nuances in attribution of an **Absolute** meaning to technique in the contemporary world. He observed that, preceding the beginning and following the end, there is the "relationship with nothingness" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 315), towards which all things move or return, expressing, in other words, the inherent finitude of everything. The Italian philosopher described his interpretation of Severino's perspective as follows:

A *phýsis* that blossoms by itself or a *kósmos* that subsists by itself—this first and last theme of all expressions of Greek thought—is nullified by the creationist and eschatological hypothesis, according to which the world came from nothing (*ex nihilo*) and will conclude in nothing (*ad nihilum*). Nothingness is the horizon that encompasses the biblical world. Its beginning is the beginning of the end (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 315).

Severino demonstrated that the transience and temporality of beings are intrinsically related to the concept of eternity of the instant, and Galimberti clarified that this notion of technological nihilism resides in "the elevation of the

non-being of all things to the level of a condition for their advancement and progress" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 705). This is because, for the Monza philosopher, "in the eyes of technology, the transience of all things—their becoming obsolete and being surpassed, their non-durability—is the condition of their existence" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 705). All of this reveals not only nihilism but also the recognition of technique as an **Absolute**⁷.

The technological entities brought by Severino are not merely physical objects or products of human engineering. They are, in fact, manifestations of a deeper transformation of existence—what Galimberti calls "power" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 384–385), which consists of "the very essence of *téchne*" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 384–385). Galimberti accepts Severino's categorization of technological entities, that is, productive technique and acquisitive technology (*poietikè téchne* and *ktetikè téchne*), which are associated with acquisitions such as "profit, property, hunting, and knowledge" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 385). Galimberti clarifies that these technical entities are intended for the ordering of what has already been produced. However, for the author of *La filosofia futura*, it is also necessary to distinguish between two types of technology: the divine (*theïa téchne*), which is "responsible for the entities of nature" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 385), and the human (*anthropine téchne*), which produces entities "that, in human arts, are brought from non-being to being" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 385).

Galimberti reinforces Severino's conception of technological nihilism by describing the beginning of the **Age of Technique** as a movement of incessant increase, in which technology no longer aims at a specific end but unfolds upon itself in the pursuit of its own enhancement and transformation.

The Age of Technique begins when the use of technique no longer aims at a purpose (not even profit) but only its own enhancement. And this occurs when it becomes clear that the achievement of any end is subordinated to technological availability, and therefore, the enhancement of this availability ends up representing the only true end (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 446).

Severino's philosophy is thus mobilized in the construction of Galimberti's thesis of technique as an **Absolute**. From this perspective, the subordination of ideological objectives to the strength and effectiveness of the apparatus, which is technique itself, becomes inevitable. The apparatus, by itself, has an objective that is not ideological but rather an indefinite increase in its effectiveness and its capacity to achieve any kind of objective⁸. Consequently, one observes the profound transformation that the rise of technique has exerted on traditional perceptions of the **Absolute**, to the extent that Galimberti highlights the paradigm shift when technique ceases to aim solely at specific ends and begins to seek "its own enhancement as the only and true end" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 446). This constant pursuit of enhancement, thematized by Severino, reveals the nihilistic nature of technique: "an incessant search to increase its own effectiveness, which, in turn, becomes the fundamental objective of civilization" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 446). Within this framework, the thesis of technique as an **Absolute** is inspired by Severino's ideas on how the profound transformations brought about by technique redefine human nature itself.

4 UMBERTO GALIMBERTI, A TECHNOPESSIMIST PHILOSOPHER?

There are different ways to classify philosophers of technology, the most well-known being that of Mitcham (1994), which distinguishes between the Philosophies of Technology of engineers and humanists. Essentially, this perspective suggests that the former have an approach focused on operations and problem-solving related to technological apparatuses, while the latter tend to adopt a more reflective and critical stance on technology and its social, cultural, ethical, or historical consequences (FRANSSEN; LOKHORST; VAN DE POEL, 2021, p. 252-260). However, prior to this, Ferré (1995) distinguished between "bright" and "dark" philosophies of technique (FERRÉ, 1995, p. 54-74). The first group includes figures such as Karl Marx, while the second includes Martin Heidegger, one of the main references for the author of *Psiche e Techne*.

The Italian philosopher inherited from the author of *Being and Time* (1927) the idea of provoking nature from a Judeo-Christian perspective: "it is the will of God, who desires man's dominion over the world [...] to be faithful to God's command means [...] the right to dominion" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 549). Thus, science and technique correspond to a continuous **provocation** of nature, which, as seen above, entails bringing truth before oneself. As a consequence, Heidegger identified a tendency toward the instrumentalization of nature by humans, which corresponds to technical provocation. However, beyond the German philosopher, Galimberti's Philosophy of Technique also carries influences from several other philosophers, particularly Nietzsche and Severino. One can see that Galimberti inherits from the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the premises for asserting that in the Age of Technique, guided by technical rationality, all human actions considered free actually occur under the logic of the technical apparatus itself. Thus, life would be lived only under a regime of **concealed servitude** to technique. From Severino, Galimberti borrowed the idea of the nihilism of technique. Therefore, like all other things, technique is transient, and thus, the very condition of technical existence is its impermanence.

It has been shown that Galimberti drew on these ideas from Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Severino to support the thesis of **Technique** as an **Absolute**. Thus, from *Psiche e Techne*, one learns that technique addresses the absence of **ends** by becoming absolute, thereby altering the horizon into instrumentality, that is, into artifacts with an end in themselves. In other words, in the **Age of Technique**, where technique itself manifests as the ultimate horizon, individuals lose the ability to perceive objectives beyond the apparatus. The two passages below elucidate Galimberti's proposition:

To this troubling *finalism*, technique has offered a remedy by absolutizing itself, that is, by making the horizon of instrumentality, through which technique expresses itself, the ultimate horizon. In doing so, it renders the absence of ends invisible, to the point of eliminating the very need for them (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 789).

The much-contested expression of Machiavelli "the end justifies the means" no longer has meaning in the age of technique, not because a higher level of morality has been reached, but because no end justifies the means anymore, given that only the means justify the ends (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 789).

The content of this thesis, combined with the fact that Galimberti draws upon figures associated with darker views on technology, may give the impression that

Galimberti's Philosophy of Technology endorses a **technopessimistic**⁹ stance. Consequently, the author would be, to some extent, aligned with the romantic tradition that, since the 18th century, has exclusively emphasized the "problematic and pernicious" aspects of technology, in Dusek's terms (2009, p. 9). But is this interpretation accurate?

In this reading, it has been identified that the Italian philosopher highlights human capacities for **adaptation, anticipation, and imagination** as ways to counteract the Absolute of technique. These are the tools humanity uses to awaken from the alienation imposed by technique, which, as seen, has at this point already transformed "means into ends" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 18) and changed the course of technique itself, ensuring the survival of the human species and its evolution on Earth. Therefore, as this study aims to indicate, it would not be correct to label Galimberti as a technopessimist.

First, Galimberti points out that technique completely fills the gap of man's instinctive incompleteness. This means that it provides means that "carve [...] a world for man" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 828), and it is this technical carving, which compensates for the biological deficiency of the human species, that ensures its survival on Earth. According to the author:

To say, at this point, that technique is the essence of man means, on the one hand, that, given the insufficiency of his own natural endowment, without technical action, man would not have survived, and, on the other, that to compensate for his biological deficiency, man possesses plasticity in adaptation, and for this reason, one could say, with Gehlen, that man does not simply "live" but "leads his life," that "in the world he takes a position," through processes of selection and stabilization with which he culturally achieves the selectivity and stability that animals possess "by nature" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 828-829).

In this sense, Galimberti's view of pre-technological societies suggests that even before the advent of modern technology, the human capacity for **adaptation** was evident. Technique, in that context, was a natural extension of man that ensured the survival of the species by enabling the active creation of an environment suited to its needs.

[...] this means, on the one hand, that the technical apparatus can avoid those explicit forms of obligation that were required in pre-technological societies to achieve adaptation, and, on the other hand, that individuals, to integrate into the apparatus, can dispense with explicit efforts of adaptation (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 752).

Second, Galimberti trusts in the human capacity for **anticipation**, the ability to foresee hypothetical scenarios, attributing meaning to human interaction with the world. The Italian philosopher recognizes that the main challenge for humanity lies in the loss (especially the loss) of its own abilities to anticipate and control present and future scenarios.

[...] in the modern age, Descartes inaugurates science in its "mathematical" sense, that is, "anticipatory," considering that science cannot be conducted by being overwhelmed by the torrent of information that comes from observing nature, but that it is necessary to anticipate the hypothetical scheme and see if nature corresponds to this scheme (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 214).

However, it is undeniable that Galimberti recognizes the importance of technique in human survival and evolution, highlighting the human capacity to construct a world for itself, compensating for its biological lack of tools. The Italian philosopher's confidence in human anticipation indicates an optimistic stance regarding humanity's potential to confront the challenges imposed by technique.

Indeed, it is necessary to prevent the age of technique from marking this absolutely new and perhaps irreversible point in history, where the question is no longer: "What can we do with technique?" but rather: "What can technique do to us?" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 829).

Galimberti understands that the human capacity for anticipation is inherent to the species and plays a crucial role in assigning meaning, understanding, and actively adapting to changes in the world. Therefore, the author holds a certain expectation regarding humanity's ability to face life's challenges, including those related to technology in the **Age of Technique**.

In fact, it is the anticipation of future action that brings forth the meaning of things, but this anticipation is a symbolic event. It is the anticipation of future action that determines whether something is a "means"; thus, if the future action is the act of "drinking," then the glass is a container for water; but if the future action is the act of "attacking," then the glass is a blunt object. Things, in themselves, are available for all meanings; what assigns them meaning [...] is the anticipation of future actions, but these anticipations are precisely symbols, which, therefore, do not signify but act, and their action is the assignment of meaning, upon which the use of the thing depends (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 214).

Third, in *Psiche e Techne*, a positive perspective is observed concerning the human power to create and anticipate a world. Thus, the Italian philosopher treats **imagination** as a force that transcends the temporal separation between the imaginary and the real: it is imagination that allows humans to make the nonexistent existent, producing meaning for the perception of a habitable world. Therefore, Galimberti acknowledges that imagination is not limited to representing what is already present; it is imagination that enables us to anticipate and construct possible scenarios, thereby introducing a space for innovation and the expansion of the perceptible world. In this sense, imagination is central when it comes to facing technological challenges.

Between the imaginary and the real, there has always existed that temporal gap that allows the imaginary to make the absent present and thus anticipate the creation of a world. By capturing in the given that to which the given refers, imagination captures in the future that complementary meaning of which the perceived given is lacking (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 729).

Galimberti is explicit in stating that human beings: (1) adapt the world to their needs; (2) anticipate habitable and perceptible scenarios; and (3) have imagination as an ally in facing challenges, including technological ones. This demonstrates that, for the Italian philosopher, humanity is not irrevocably condemned to the **Age of Technique**. This is because those three human capacities, according to Galimberti, serve as essential counterpoints to the **Absolute of Technique**. Therefore, when analyzing *Psiche e Techne*, it becomes evident that there is no fatalism regarding the Absolute of this era. Galimberti may be aligned with somber philosophical perspectives and even associated with romantic traditions of thought, but while it may be an overstatement to consider him a **techno-**

optimist¹⁰, it is safe to affirm that *Psiche e Techne* is not an **anti-technological** work. The text presents elements that allow for an interpretation in which technique, in itself, provides humans with the means to awaken and recognize the prevailing Absolute in the Age of Technique. This “psychic expansion” (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 829) would open the possibility of inventing resources capable of preventing human extinction. In the words of the Italian philosopher:

This psychic expansion, far from being sufficient to dominate technique, at least prevents technique from unfolding without humans being aware of it and, from being an essential condition for human existence, turning into the cause of their extinction (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 829).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Umberto Galimberti is a key reference in contemporary Italian philosophical thought, with particular emphasis on his reflections on technological society and its influences on the human psyche. This, in fact, is the central concern of *Psiche e Techne*, where it is asserted that **Technique** has become the **Absolute** of the human condition. Despite this, Galimberti’s reflections on Technique are not adequately included in reference works in the PoT.

Galimberti’s Philosophy of Technology draws on various intellectual references to conclude that modern human beings, immersed in the **Age of Technique**, have been reduced to the condition of mere extensions (or means) of the technical apparatus. Some of Galimberti’s theses, deeply influenced by Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Severino, may give the impression that he is a philosopher who exclusively emphasizes the negative aspects of technology. However, it is important to highlight that, for the Italian philosopher, the human capacities for **adaptation**, **anticipation**, and **imagination** serve as means to resist technological alienation. Thus, since it is possible to restore the human condition as subjects in a modern world—that is, where technical means are no longer the ends of human actions—there is no reason to interpret Galimberti’s thought as **technopessimistic**.

The interpretation that follows is that Galimberti’s view of **the Age of Technique** as a period of technical domination presents a critical approach that envisions a horizon in which human beings can free themselves from their technologically dominated (alienated) condition. However, this conclusion should not lead us to believe that the author of *Psiche e Techne* ignores the harmful aspects of technology—which would, in turn, make him a technocrat or a naïve techno-optimist.

UMBERTO GALIMBERTI: UM FILÓSOFO TECNOPESSIMISTA?

RESUMO

Na obra *Psiche e Techne* Umberto Galimberti afirma que a Técnica se tornou o Absoluto da condição humana. Assim, para esse filósofo da técnica italiano, o ser humano moderno, vivendo na Idade da Técnica, acabou reduzido à condição de mera extensão (ou meio) do aparato técnico. Este artigo busca (1) situar o pensamento de Galimberti no cenário contemporâneo da Filosofia da Tecnologia italiana, (2) abordar como a visão galimbertiana apropria-se de ideias de Heidegger, Nietzsche e Severino e (3) discutir se é apropriado considerar Galimberti como um filósofo tecnopessimista. Conclui-se que Galimberti reconhece como algumas capacidades humanas (adaptação, antecipação e imaginação) podem restaurar nossa condição de sujeitos, e não objetos da alienação tecnológica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Filosofia da Tecnologia. Umberto Galimberti. Técnica como Absoluto. Tecnopessimista. Idade da Técnica.

NOTES

1. For example, Dusek (2009), Scharff & Dusek (2014), or Coeckelbergh (2019).
2. Galimberti translated the following works by Jaspers: *Sulla verità (raccolta antologica) [On Truth (Anthological Collection)]* (1970), *La fede filosofica [Philosophical Faith]* (1973), and *Filosofia* (1978). As a translator, Galimberti also worked on writings by Martin Heidegger, notably *Sull'essenza della verità [On the Essence of Truth]* (1973).
3. Works by Galimberti available in Portuguese: *Rastros do sagrado* (2003), from the original *Orme del sacro*; *Os vícios capitais e os novos vícios* (2004), from *I vizi capitali e i nuovi vizi*; *Coisas do amor* (2009), from *Le cose dell'amore*; and *Dicionário de Psicologia* (2010), from *Dizionario di psicologia*.
4. Galimberti emphasizes: "Nietzsche recalls: 'Man in himself, the absolute man, has neither dignity, nor rights, nor duties,' but this means realizing for all that freedom which the Greeks considered possible for only a few: therefore, realizing not idealistically, but materially, this freedom" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 654).
5. Galimberti asserts: "Heidegger sees nothing but a re-proposition of the Greek concept of truth (*alétheia*), as the transition from the hidden (*lêthe*) to the manifest (*a-lêtheia*), and for this reason, he can say: The essence of technology is nothing technological [*das Wesen der Technik nichts Technisches ist*]" (GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 547).
6. "Only a god can still save us now." Interview given by Martin Heidegger to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, published in issue 23, 1976. Translation and notes by Irene Borges-Duarte.
7. Galimberti highlights: "Western culture may have the capacity to set no limits to the aggression against beings, which technology continues to drive ever deeper [...] because the essence of such culture is metaphysical nihilism, of which technology is the most radical and rigorous realization. [...] If something is not *technikón*—that is, if it does not produce or is not produced, or does not enter the process of producing-being-produced—then it is not, meaning it is nothing. *Anthropíne téchne* has today been completely replaced by *theîa téchne*, but the meaning of being remains identical to what Plato once and for all established in the history of the West. God and modern technology are the two fundamental expressions of metaphysical nihilism" (SEVERINO, 1969 *apud* GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 705-706).
8. Galimberti writes: "The subordination of ideological objectives to the power and efficiency of the Apparatus, that is, to its capacity to achieve objectives, becomes inevitable. Such subordination is the specific way in which the civilization of technology leads to the decline of ideologies. The Apparatus (and all its fractions) already possesses an objective in itself. This is not an ideological objective, for which ideology uses the Apparatus as a means and instrument: rather, it is the objective that the Apparatus possesses in itself, which consists in acquiring an ever-increasing capacity to achieve objectives in general. The objective that the Apparatus possesses in itself is the indefinite increase of power, that is, its ability to accomplish any kind of objective" (SEVERINO, 1989 *apud* GALIMBERTI, 2006, p. 446).

9. Marx (2013) developed an analysis of the concept of technopessimism, relating it to social and cultural changes, as well as to the questioning of the applicability of technologies and whether they have fulfilled their promises of improving life or have caused more problems than solutions. He also examined how these pessimistic attitudes can influence cultural and philosophical movements, such as postmodernism, which often questions narratives of unlimited progress associated with technology.

10. Regarding the concept of techno-optimism, Königs (2022) developed an analysis that helps define what constitutes a techno-optimist. The qualification of a philosopher as a techno-optimist depends on how they distribute the impacts associated with a technology or technology as a whole, and whether this distribution of impact is considered favorable or not for society as a whole.

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