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14:00 - 15:30

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EMPOWERING CHANGEMAKERS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

“READING THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY TO UNDERSTAND THE MECHANIZATION OF VALUES AND ITS ONTOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES”

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ABSTRACT



We examine Ellul’s notion of technique—“the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency . . . *in every field of human activity*” in our technological society (1964: xxv, italics added)—to enable scholars of organizations and institutions to better grasp the process through which technique “transforms everything it touches into a machine” (Ellul, 1964: 4). Our first aim is to illuminate the process through which technique transforms values – a process we describe as the *mechanization of values* in organizations and institutions. Rather than appreciating the protean character of different values, technique eliminates value plurality, and it does so by reinforcing formal rationality as a process first, and as a ‘product of thought’ later. Our second aim seeks to identify the consequences of said mechanization, especially since technique converts a spontaneous and unreflective outlook on life into one that is rationalized and deliberate. We suggest that this sets in motion a set of successive consequences, starting with *ontological monism*, leading to *ontological impoverishment*, and culminating in the *need for ontological re-invigoration*. Throughout, we illustrate our theorizing with concrete examples. We close by teasing out the theoretical and practical ramifications of our review essay for organizational and institutional theory.



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