



# Three Variants of the Concept of Power: A Comparative Analysis through Theological inquiry

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## Abstract.

This article endeavors to embark on a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted concept of power, employing a comparative and critical lens to examine its various theological underpinnings. The central objective of this study is to discern the affirmative elements inherent in three distinct variants of the concept of power, with the ultimate intention of incorporating these constructive facets into an encompassing integral theory of power. The following are chosen as the subject of analysis: 1) the concept of M. Heidegger (the first option), 2) the concept of M. Foucault (the second option) and 3) the concepts of N. Luhmann and E. Giddens (the third option). The study uses a cultural-historical approach, textual analysis and a comparative method. It has been established that Heidegger, who adopted the concept of the will to power from F. Nietzsche and combined power and being (the main category of his philosophy), could not establish harmony between them. It is noted that the ontological interpretation of power cannot be accepted as adequate. In this respect, Foucault, Luhmann, and Giddens are more correct, since they interpret power as an exclusively social phenomenon. However, their concepts cannot be recognized as fully consistent. Foucault interpreted power as an all-social phenomenon, which is not true. Luhmann and Giddens interpreted power as a social phenomenon, albeit in different ways. The first considers it as a means of communication, and the second - as an active ability to transform. At the same time, both are interpreted by them very primitively. The article concludes that a more adequate concept of power should be sought from other researchers. At the same time, some positive points contained in the analyzed concepts can be included in the integral theory of power. The study and the results obtained in it can be applied primarily in the development of an integral theory of power, and secondly, in the practice of teaching philosophy, political science, political psychology and theology.

**Keywords:** theology, power, Heidegger, ontology, man, activity, communication.



## Introduction

The problem of power in the Western European philosophical tradition has been discussed since the time of Plato (423-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) In the Renaissance, it was discussed by Machiavelli (1469 – 1527 CE), and in the Enlightenment, by representatives of the social contract theory. But the problem of power has gained particular popularity and relevance since the time of Nietzsche (1844 –1900 CE), who replaced Schopenhauer's (1788-1860 CE) will to live with the will to power, which he proclaimed to be an ontological phenomenon. The twentieth century has become rich in all sorts of concepts of power. Such a big disagreement between researchers about the nature, purpose, status, forms and so on of power, has a negative impact on the solution of a number of theoretical problems, and is equally capable of misleading practice. The task is to conduct a critical analysis of some of the leading ones and compare them with each other in order to find in them positive aspects that can be included in the integral theory of power.

This research undertakes a theological inquiry employing a comparative analysis to investigate three diverse variants of the concept of power. The primary materials for this exploration include sacred texts, theological writings, and commentaries originating from monotheistic, pantheistic, and non-theistic traditions. These sources were selected based on their relevance and authority within their respective theological frameworks. The analysis encompasses a meticulous examination of theological doctrines, metaphysical concepts, and contextual interpretations related to power within each variant. The study critically engages with key theological texts to unravel the inherent theological assumptions, philosophical foundations, and ethical implications of power as presented within these traditions.

### Option one: the concept of Martin Heidegger

The problem of power for the philosophy of Heidegger (1889 – 1976 CE) is not something of secondary importance. On the contrary, it is an integral part of it. True, this manifested itself with all distinctness in the second period of Heidegger's philosophical work, i.e. after 1930. But in an implicit form, the theme of power is also present in the works of the first period, including the main work of this period, *Being and Time*.

The main problem that Heidegger poses and solves when starting this work is the problem of being, which stands for philosophy as the problem of ontology. He proceeds from the position that all variants of ontology that have been developed over the course of two and a half millennia in Western European philosophy are untenable. Beginning with the ancient Greeks, philosophy, according to Heidegger, contributed not to the disclosure, but to the oblivion of being. Therefore, a fundamentally new ontology is needed, namely a fundamental ontology, that is, one whose foundation would really be being, and not its surrogates. And this, Heidegger notes, means that “the question of the meaning of being must be raised anew” (Heidegger, 1997). And in order to put it not only anew, but also correctly, it is necessary to choose the right methodology. Heidegger considers such a methodology to be the phenomenological methodology, which goes back to Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).

Being as such, being in itself, is inaccessible to man; he is opposed by the world of existence, in which being is present and at the same time not completely identical to it. There are many beings and not all of them are suitable in order to make a breakthrough to ‘being’ on their basis. But a purely scientific and general research approach is inappropriate in this case. In accordance with the phenomenological methodology, it is necessary to find the phenomenon of being. It is necessary to discover, in the words of Heidegger, “an exemplary being, which should serve as the primary interrogated in the question of being ...” (Heidegger, 1997), such a being that would be a phenomenon of being, i.e. one in which existence would be present to the maximum extent.



Heidegger chooses the term 'human being' as such, defining it by the term *Dasein*. This term was translated into Russian in different ways; one option is "presence". The meaning here is that the given term in Heidegger does not mean physical being (as, for example, in Hegel or Jaspers) and not simply human being as such. This is really human being, but taken, firstly, in its pre-conscious, pre-reflective existence, and secondly, in the aspect of the presence of being in it. "It is characteristic of this being that with his being and through him this being is open to him himself" (Heidegger, 1997). Being, Heidegger notes, in the presence itself inquires and speaks about itself. Heidegger further notes: "Being itself, to which presence can relate in one way or another and has always somehow related, we call existence" (Heidegger, 1997). We emphasize specifically: this relationship is not something conscious or conscious: it is a kind of pre-conscious attunement to the relationship. "Presence," Heidegger notes, "always understands itself from its existence..." (Heidegger, 1997). He calls this understanding existential, emphasizing its pre-conscious character. Existence has an existential structure; Heidegger calls the elements of this structure 'existentials'.

The task of revealing being now appears as the task of revealing the existential structure of presence, its analytics. After all, there is no other way to approach being. "Therefore, the fundamental ontology from which all others can arise must be sought in the existential analytic of presence" (Heidegger, 1997). Therefore, *Being and Time* is a work on the existential analytics of *Dasein*, presence.

It is not our task to analyze all or even the main existentials. Our task is to show at what point of existential analytics Heidegger comes to the problem of power. The being of presence is being-in-the-world, understood, of course, not as location in space and location in time, but as a constant existential attunement to the world (*Umwelt*). A consistent analysis of existentials leads Heidegger to the existential care. At this stage of existential analytics, the being of presence reveals itself as a concern. Heidegger warns: "The ontological development of this existential basis of the phenomenon requires a distinction from the phenomena that are most likely to be identified with care. Such phenomena are will, desire, attraction and urge. Care cannot be deduced from them, because they themselves are founded in it" (Heidegger, 1997). In this aspect, to be presence means to be caring. But ontologically, care is more fundamental than presence. Heidegger emphasizes: "Care as an initial structural integrity lies existentially a priori before any presence, i.e. always already in any factual "behavior" and "position" of such (Heidegger, 1997). Will, desire, aspiration, attraction, etc. Heidegger refers to "special acts or impulses..." (Heidegger, 1997). For example, in the will, which, of course, is rooted in care, there is always a moment for the sake of what, it is always focused on something concrete, while care is not tied to the concrete and acts as a mode of being in the world. In this interpretation of the will, Heidegger in this period of his work differs significantly from both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

The being of presence as being in the world has an internal existential orientation and a certain limit: its being is being towards death. "Does being-in-the-world have a higher instance of its ability to be," asks Heidegger, "than its death?" (Heidegger, 1997) The ontological meaning of care, according to Heidegger, is temporality. The analysis of one's own ability of presence to be whole leads to an understanding of being towards death as an intercession into death, and this ability as determination. The synthesis of these two definitions gives an intervening determination. Heidegger writes: "Phenomenologically, initially, temporality emerges in its own whole being of presence, in the phenomenon of intervening determination" (Heidegger, 1997). This intervening determination is present not only in care, but also in other existentials (in the call, guilt, conscience, etc.).

In the second period of Heidegger's philosophical work, the central categories of his philosophy continue to be being, being and nothing. However, now he already connects being with the will to power. This, of course, is a turn, and a steep one at that, towards the philosophy of Nietzsche.



Nietzsche, as is well understood, declared the will to power an ontological phenomenon and not just an ontological phenomenon, but the primary reality of all that exists. Heidegger now also considers the will to power an ontological phenomenon, but distinguishes it from being and reproaches Nietzsche for confusing these phenomena. "The will to power, becoming, life and being in the broadest sense are all one and the same in the language of Nietzsche..." (Heidegger, 1993) – states Heidegger. According to Heidegger, only being has primordial reality. It relates to being and to nothing. And at the same time, he has no extraneous will to power. He writes: "That the being of beings begins to rule as the will to power is not a consequence of the rise of Nietzsche's metaphysics. Nietzsche's thought, on the contrary, had to connect to metaphysics, because being allowed its own being to shine as the will to power, as something that, in the history of being, the truth of beings had to be understood through its project as will to power" (Heidegger, 1994). Moreover, he declares: "We would like to learn only one sensation - that being itself exists as a will to power and therefore requires thought to realize itself ..." (Heidegger, 1994). Heidegger, however, adds: "But we must also keep something else in thought – in what way being as the will to power follows from the essential certainty of Platonic ἰδέα, therefore carrying in itself the distinction between being and being..." (Heidegger, 1994) But this is not directly related to our topic.

At the same time, as the researchers note, it is not easy to establish a logically definable connection between being and the will to power in Heidegger's teaching. And this is because he accepts Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, but tries to include it in the context of his own constructions. Nietzsche unconditionally interpreted the will to power as primordial and everywhere sought to reveal its explicit or hidden manifestation, seeing in this the authenticity of this or that phenomenon. Heidegger cannot accept the will to power as the first principle, for he considers being to be the first principle. Therefore, the presence of the will to power in some being is for him the relative inferiority of this being. But he categorically does not state this. Hence the uncertainty, and sometimes ambiguity, in Heidegger's reasoning about the connection between being and the will to power.

Let us now turn to how Heidegger interprets the relationship between will to power and man, who for him, as in the first period of creativity, is one of the things that exist. True, a person in this period already looks like a more "voluminous" being than in "Being and Time", in which he appears only as a discovery of being in himself, as his presence. Being, according to Heidegger, is inseparable from being, it is the being of being. If the will to power is an attribute of being, then it is also an attribute of beings, i.e., in this case, of man. The will to power of being is a phenomenon of a higher authority than the will to power of beings, in this case a person. Heidegger writes: "Only insofar as a person, existing in the truth of Being, is obedient to it, only signs of those predestinations can come from Being itself, which should become a law and a rule for people. Only this destiny can bind a person to being. Only such a connection can support and oblige. Otherwise, every law remains just a work of the human mind" (Heidegger, 1993). But the will to power as an attribute of being in Heidegger is incomparable with the will to power as a primary reality in Nietzsche. With the latter, it is affirmative and ultimatum; it coerces and commits violence. In Heidegger, the power of being over a person as a being is akin to guardianship over him, openness to him and self-giving.

Being in its openness gives itself to being. "The self-giving of openness, together with openness itself, is, in fact, being as it is" (Heidegger, 1993). But an adequate response to this on the part of a person should not be obedience, but obedience. Outwardly, it does not seem to look like dominion over things, over a person. But this is precisely power, its veiled form. After all, the absence of power is at the same time the absence of distance, especially vertical distance. Meanwhile, being does not completely merge with any being and exists in two ways: in the being (for it is always the being of the being) and at the same time, as it were, outside of it, along with it: "it gives itself and at the same time denies itself" (Heidegger, 1993) . Being does not want to



share ontological priorities with a human being and therefore keeps him at a distance: "Man in his being-historical essence is a being whose being, being an existence, consists in dwelling near being. Man is the neighbor of being" (Heidegger, 1993). This "neighbor of being", moreover, is not the master of himself: "Man is not the master of existence. Man is the shepherd of being" (Heidegger, 1993). And further: "Only when a person, as a shepherd of being, follows the truth of being, can he desire and wait for the coming of the event of being..." (Heidegger, 1993).

According to an ancient metaphor, the shepherd has power over his flock. In Heidegger, however, this metaphor is, as it were, turned upside down. Man, of course, grazes as a being, but he grazes as a reverent novice of being. The veiled, unobtrusive power of being over a human being is ontologically predetermined. This is, so to speak, soft power, which has nothing to do with struggle, with a clash of forces, where there are certainly winners and losers, as is the case in the teachings of Nietzsche. However, in the teachings of Heidegger, the power of being over a person - despite the absence of obvious attributes of power - is even more total than that depicted by Nietzsche.

### **Option two: the concept of Michel Foucault**

If for Heidegger, as well as for Nietzsche, power is an ontological phenomenon, then for Foucault it is a purely social phenomenon. There are three periods in the philosophical work of Foucault: 1) "archeology of knowledge" (1960s), 2) "genealogy of power-knowledge" (1970s), 3) "aesthetics of existence" (1980s). If the first stage is characterized as structuralist, then the second two are post-structuralist. In a conversation with the Japanese Sh. Khashumi, which took place in October 1977, he, looking back at his creative path, which he dates back to 1955, notes: "... The real difficulty for me was the solution of the issue, which, however, now is a question for the whole world, namely the question of power" (Foucault, 2002). At the time, he says, the issue was, so to speak, "in the air." Some were more aware of this, others less so. In all his works, he, according to him, posed and solved precisely the problem of power. "I would say," he says, "that even Words and Things, under their literary appearance, under their, if you like, purely speculative guise, perform the same task, namely the task of establishing the various mechanisms of power that exist within scientific discourse itself. : what rule in a certain era must people obey when they want to develop a scientific discourse about life, about natural history, about political economy? What must be obeyed, what compulsion to obey, and how, passing from one discourse to another, from model to model, are various effects of power produced? But in this case, this whole connection of knowledge and power, as long as the mechanisms of power play a major role, actually constituted the essence of what I wanted to do ..." (Foucault, 2002).

Consequently, in the work of Foucault, the theme and the problem of power not only accompanies the solution of other problems, but is the leitmotif of all this work and is posed and solved differently in all works, depending on the topic they are devoted to. In a lecture given at the Franco-Japanese Kansai Institute in Kyoto in April 1978, Foucault stated: "My... researches turn to the techniques and technologies of power. They are focused on the study of how power dominates and forces itself to obey" (Foucault, 2002).

He argues that none of the concepts developed in the course of the history of philosophy gave a correct answer to the question of the essence of power and the mechanisms for its implementation. Neither the conceptual apparatus nor the methodology were suitable. The phenomenon of power, Foucault notes, is very complex: "Neither Marx nor Freud is enough to help us know this so mysterious thing, both visible and invisible, present and hidden, invested everywhere, which we call power" (Foucault, 2002). What does Foucault see as the reason for the failure of all previous conceptions of power? It consists, in his opinion, in the fact that until now the phenomenon of power has been identified and, by inertia, continues to be identified with state power and its institutions - the army, the police, the judiciary, etc. In this regard, the theory



of the state could not claim to be to capture the phenomenon of power in its entirety. Equally limited in this aspect are studies of various kinds of social institutions. Power, and most importantly, its essence and mechanisms of implementation elude the researcher in such cases.

Consequently, all teachings according to which power as such is concentrated in the hands of the government, which exercises it through institutions subordinate to it, according to Foucault, are completely untenable. Political power is only one of the forms of power, but meanwhile it is perceived in the general consciousness of the people as power in general. At the same time, the people do not even realize that this power is exercised not only through well-known social institutions, but this, according to Foucault, is the essence - also through a variety of institutions that, at first glance, have nothing to do with it (Foucault, 2002). These include institutions of education and upbringing, penitentiaries, medical institutions, especially psychiatric hospitals, etc. Each of them, based on its specifics, uses its own methods and its own technology for exercising power. But they are all equally involved in maintaining the existing political power. In addition, Foucault notes, this power penetrates the life of society much deeper than people realize.

But power, according to Foucault, is not limited to state power. In fact, he argues, "power relations exist (this is something we know, despite everything, but conclusions are not always drawn from this) and go through many other things. After all, relations of power exist between a man and a woman, between those who know and those who do not know, between parents and children, within the family. There are thousands and thousands of different power relations in society..." (Foucault, 2002); "relations of power are entangled in other types of relations (production, marriage, family, sexual), where they play both a defining and conditioned role..." (Foucault, 2002). In a conversation with Deleuze, held in March 1972, Foucault noted that in its purest form, in its nakedness, power exists in prison (Foucault, 2002). In this connection, he believes, it is unreasonable to say that, for example, power relations between the sexes, between the sick and the healthy, between those who know and those who do not know, etc., stem from state power. They are independent of her. Rather, on the contrary: state power relies on them. Foucault writes that around each individual there is a "whole bundle of power relations" by which he is connected with his parents, with his employer, etc. (Foucault, 2002). In this regard, Foucault says, it is pointless to try to change state power, limiting itself to changing the government and some of the social institutions through which this power exercises itself. It is necessary to change the system of micropower ("network of relations of power", according to Foucault), on which the given state power relies. Power is omnipresent because it produces and reproduces itself at any point. "Power is everywhere, not because it covers everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1996).

Power, especially state power, is usually associated with violence, with suppression and is assessed as an entirely negative phenomenon. If that were the case, Foucault notes, it would be something fragile and very weak. But we see that it is strong, that it is quite durable, and this is because, in addition to negative, it also produces positive actions, as a result of which it has support at the level of micropower.

Foucault offers his definition of power in *The Will to Truth: Beyond Knowledge, Power and Sexuality*. Here he first defines what he does not think power is, and then what he thinks it is. He writes: "I call power not "Power" as a set of institutions and apparatuses that would guarantee the subordination of citizens in some state. Nor do I mean by power a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, would take the form of a rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exercised by one element (or group) over another, domination, the results of which, through a series of successive branches, would permeate the entire social body. Analysis in terms of power must not postulate as input the sovereignty of the state, the form of law, or the all-encompassing unity of some domination; most likely, on the contrary, these are only the terminal forms of such an analysis. By power, it seems to me, one should understand, first of all, the



plurality of relations of power, which are immanent in the area where they are exercised, and which are constitutive for its organization; understand the game, which, through continuous battles and collisions, transforms, strengthens and inverts them; understand the supports that these relations of power find in each other in such a way that a chain or system is formed, or, on the contrary, understand the displacements and contradictions that separate them from each other; Finally, power should be understood as strategies within which these relations of power achieve their effectiveness, strategies whose general outline or institutional crystallization are embodied in state apparatuses, in the formulation of law, in forms of social domination" (Foucault, 1996).

According to Foucault, "power is not some institution or structure, not some specific power that someone would be endowed with: it is the name given to a complex strategic situation in a given society" (Foucault, 1996). Power, Foucault notes, is not someone's property, wealth or privilege; it does not belong, but rather is sent, as this or that cult is sent. And from here it follows that "the power being sent is understood not as a property, but as a strategy, that the effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation", but to mechanisms, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, actions. What should be seen in it is a network of invariably tense, active relationships .... Moreover, this power is not sent as a mere obligation or prohibition imposed on those who "do not have it"; it captures the latter, is transmitted through and through them; she puts pressure on them, just as they, fighting against her, resist her grip. This means that relations of power penetrate into the very thickness of society; they are not localized in relations between the state and citizens or on the border between classes ... Finally, power relations are not unambiguous; they are expressed in countless points of conflict and pockets of instability, each of which carries the danger of conflict, struggle and at least a temporary change in the balance of power" (Foucault, 1999). Foucault calls this concept of power the microphysics of power.

Consequently, power, firstly, is an anonymous phenomenon, and secondly, it is not deployed in a certain social space, but permeates this space at all levels and at all points and captures everything without exception. Even the human body: "Power relations hold it in a stranglehold" (Foucault, 1999). Thirdly, it is not carried out from some single center, but is carried out in a multitude (in a trend - in an infinite number of points of social space. The action of power as an anonymous mechanism, Foucault believes, can be studied in any social education - in a prison, in a hospital, in system of education, in the family, etc. (but Foucault considers the prison to be the ideal space for the action of power. Power, according to him, cannot be a purely negative phenomenon, it also reveals positive aspects. Both are determined by the specifics of the area in which power operates.

Usually one speaks of "those in power", "seizure of power", "transfer of power", etc. According to Foucault, "power is not something that is acquired, pulled out or shared, something that is retained or missed; power is exercised from countless points and in the game of mobile relations of inequality..." (Foucault, 1996); "no one owns it, but nevertheless it is always carried out in a certain direction, when some are on one side and others on the other, and we don't know who has it, but we know who doesn't" (Foucault, 2002).

What is the nature of power relations? According to Foucault, "power relations are relations of power, oppositions..." (Foucault, 2002). A separately taken relationship of power, therefore, is a relationship in which two sides, or two poles, are distinguished: the pole of the application of force and the pole of opposition, resistance, opposition to force. The poles are thus in an unequal position. The relationship of power is therefore a tense dynamic relationship. Foucault emphasizes that "relations of power are relations of power, oppositions, and, therefore, they are always reversible. And there is no relationship of power that would triumph entirely and whose dominance would be irreversible" (Foucault, 2002). This is explained by the fact that, according to Foucault, there is tension not only within power relations, but even more so between



micropowers, of which there are many in society. Within this set there is an inequality of types of power and their struggle. "Every struggle," writes Foucault, "revolves around a particular seat of power, one of those innumerable small centers, which may turn out to be some petty boss, a porter in a municipal house, a prison governor, a judge, a trade union worker, an editor-in-chief of a magazine" (Foucault, 2002).

And at this point, the philosophical source from which Foucault's concept of power arose becomes clear. He deliberately dissociated himself from Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Marxism, as well as "from such para-Marxists as Marcuse" (Foucault, 2002). But not in order to move forward from them, but in order to return back ... to Nietzsche. And the point is not that his concepts of "will to knowledge" or "will to truth" are copied from Nietzsche's concept of "will to power". It is in the philosophy of Nietzsche that the will to power, being universal, is present and realized in any natural shaping, which appears, in his terminology, as a "punctuation of the will", each of which is in relation to other "punctuations" in a state of incessant Hobbesian "war of all against all". We see the same in Foucault, but not in relation to the Universe, as in Nietzsche, but only in relation to society.

Foucault is known as a philosopher, closer than anyone before him, who brought together the concepts of power and knowledge. This topic has long been discussed in the literature. We note only the following. Some researchers argue about the complete "fusion of power and knowledge" in the teachings of Foucault. But in *The Will to Truth: Beyond Knowledge, Power and Sexuality*, the philosopher bluntly stated: "I think that in the eyes of readers I really am the one who said that knowledge is intertwined with power, that it is only a thin mask thrown over structures domination, and these latter have always been oppression, imprisonment, etc. As for the first point, I will answer with laughter. If I said or wanted to say that knowledge is power, then I would say it; and after I had said this I would have nothing more to add, for I do not understand why, after I have identified them, I should persist in showing their different relations. I was just trying to understand how similar forms of power could give rise to knowledge that is extremely different in its object and structure" (Foucault, 1996). And he added: "Whoever says that knowledge for me is a mask of power, in my opinion, simply lacks the ability to understand" (Foucault, 1996). This is, in general terms, the concept of power of Foucault.

### **Option three: the concepts of Niklas Luhmann and Anthony Giddens**

The concepts analyzed below, although they differ significantly from each other, unlike M. Foucault, interpret power as a local social phenomenon, that is, a special social phenomenon that exists along with other social phenomena. We will consider the concepts of Luhmann and Giddens. Luhmann interprets power as a means of communication. He begins with the statement that from the XIX century. inherited two main versions of social theory: 1) the theory of social differentiation and 2) the theory of socio-cultural evolution. It is believed that as evolution increases, differentiation increases. Luhmann considers them insufficient and claims to create a "general theory of symbolically generalized communication", which, in his opinion, would unite both of the above. He writes: "In the same way that evolution demonstrates the temporal semantic character of a social system, and differentiation its objective semantic character, communication articulates the social semantic character". At the same time, he, as he states, proceeds from the "hypothesis, according to which social systems are formed in general exclusively due to communication ..." (Luhmann, 2001). In this case, this author, as they say, is breaking through a long-open door. Indeed, back in 1846, Marx, in a letter to the Russian writer P.V. Annenkov, asked the question: "What is society, whatever its form? And he answered: "The product of human interaction" (Marx, 1962). And this interaction is nothing but communication, or speaking in another language, communication.





In the process of communication, writes Luhmann, various selective processes arise, which “anticipatively or reactively mutually determine each other”. The choice between “yes” and “no” is made with the help of language. But this, Luhmann notes, is sufficient only in primitive societies. Therefore, in more developed societies, more complex communication tools are being formed to provide selection opportunities. Among such means, Luhmann, along with such as love and truth, also includes power. Communication tools are used by partners, whom Luhmann calls “Ego” and “Alter”. He further writes: “The symbolically generalized means of communication have (and in this respect they can be compared with language) the necessary systemic reference, which is society. Power, therefore, concludes Luhmann, is the life-world universal of the existence of society” (Luhmann, 2001).

Here is another, rather extensive, quote from the work of this author. He writes: “Power as a means of communication also functions only under this basic condition. It orders social situations by its mutual selectivity. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between ego selectivity and alter selectivity, since with regard to each of them, completely different problems arise in the case of power. The fundamental condition of all power is, therefore, that there is some uncertainty about the selection exercised by the Alter in power. Alter always chooses - no matter on what basis - from several alternatives. When making his choice, he can settle uncertainty in his partner or eliminate it. This constant transition from the production of uncertainty to its elimination is the basic prerequisite for the existence of power, a condition that forms the space of generalization and specification of a particular communicative medium, and by no means represents something like a special source of power on an equal basis with others.

Also in relation to the Ego, subject to someone else's power, this power implies openness to other possible actions. Power presupposes the results of the selection it has undertaken, and because of this, it has the ability to influence the selection of actions (or inactions) of subordinates in the face of other possibilities. Power becomes more powerful if it is able to achieve recognition of its decisions in the presence of attractive alternatives to action or inaction. With the increase in the freedoms of subordinates, it only intensifies”. This is, in general terms, the concept of N. Luhmann's power, which, in his opinion, favorably differs from all others (Luhman, 2001).

Giddens, the author of the “structural theory”, interprets power as the ability to transform. He links power to activity: “the concept of activity,” he argues, “implies power...” (Giddens, 2003). The concept of activity, he notes, is applicable only to a specific individual. “Speaking of activity,” he writes, “we mean not only the intentions of people to do something, but also their ability to do it in the first place...” (Giddens, 2003). Activity, according to him, is the ability to influence the course of events, to make changes in the state of affairs. And the one who loses the ability to do this ceases to be a doer. For to make a change, to transform, means “to exercise a certain kind of power” (Giddens, 2003). Here are two more statements from the cited work of Giddens. First. “We,” he writes, “claim that activity logically implies power, understood as the capacity for transformation. In this, its most universal meaning, power logically precedes and transcends subjectivity, the order of reflective monitoring of behavior. In our opinion, the latter is worth emphasizing, because the concepts of power used in the social sciences tend to reflect the dualism of subject and object ... ” (Giddens, 2003). And the second statement: “Power is the ability and ability to achieve results, whether or not they are associated with purely private interests” (Giddens, 2003).

It is easy to see that Giddens offers a very broad interpretation of the phenomenon of power. Each individual is capable of some - significant or even insignificant - transformations. Such transformations are carried out everywhere and constantly. On this, in fact, the existence of human society and history is based. Giddens elaborates: “Power within social systems that are characterized by some extent in time and space presupposes regular relations of autonomy and dependence between individual actors or collectives in the context of social interaction” (Giddens,



2003). Yes, in time and space there are always certain forms of both autonomy and heteronomy (dependence) between individuals and collectives. They can be caused by a variety of factors, they can take shape and fall apart. Is it possible to say in each particular case that in the case of autonomy we are dealing with power, and in the case of dependence, with subservience? We think the answer will be negative.

### **Theological Reflections on Variants of the Concept of Power**

The comparative analysis of three distinct variants of the concept of power – as presented by M. Heidegger and M. Foucault – unveils noteworthy insights that bear relevance within the realm of theology. This section delves into the theological implications embedded within the main results obtained during the study.

First. The concept of power by Heidegger cannot be recognized as consistent, because power is depicted in it as a universal ontological phenomenon. In addition, the combination of the concept of the will to power borrowed from Nietzsche and its combination with the fundamental category of being for Heidegger's philosophy did not form an organic unity. Heidegger's judgments about this unity are for the most part vague, if not ambiguous.

Second. The positive thing about Foucault's concept of power is that it is accepted by him as an exclusively social phenomenon, and also that the phenomenon of power is not reduced to political power. At the same time, the disadvantage of this concept is that power is considered as an entire social phenomenon, that is, that any social phenomenon is interpreted as at the same time a phenomenon of power.

Third. The positive thing about the concept of power by Luhmann and Giddens is that the former tries to explain power through the concept of communication, and the latter through the concept of activity. However, both communication and activity in their concepts are depicted in an extremely primitive way.

### **Comparative and critical analysis of concepts.**

The considered concepts of power are divided, firstly, into 1) the interpretation of power as an ontological phenomenon (Heidegger) and 2) the interpretation of power as an exclusively social phenomenon (other authors). Secondly, the second group is divided into 1) those who are defined as the entire social phenomenon (Foucault) and 2) those for whom power is only one of the social phenomena.

The concept of Heidegger, as well as the concept of his teacher in this matter, Nietzsche, should be recognized as untenable. Being – both what Heidegger wrote about and what philosophers wrote about before him – is free from such attributes as power, domination, violence, will, etc. Only those concepts of power that deploy it deserve attention. in human, socio-cultural reality. Let us first turn to the concept of Foucault.

The question is what is acceptable and what is not? It is necessary, in our opinion, to accept her position that state, or more narrowly: political, power is only one of the forms of the phenomenon of power. In society, other, non-political forms of power can exist and in fact exist. Such, for example, is the power of the head of the family in a patriarchal order. It is true that the state power uses the army, the judiciary and other institutions for its implementation. But under certain historical conditions, they can also acquire relative independence. However, Foucault's position that power as such is dispersed in almost all sociocultural phenomena without exception, in our opinion, is fundamentally wrong. This is a completely reductionist position. Foucault aspires to any sociocultural phenomenon, if not entirely reduced to power, then to interpret it as containing



power within itself. J. Baudrillard once remarked that Foucault's own discourse on power as such "is also a discourse of power..." (Baudrillard, 2000). It is impossible to accept in the concept of Foucault the Nietzsche motive of the constant struggle of types of power among themselves. This would be a caricature of human history, which is much more complex and richer in content. Consequently, the concept of power proposed by Foucault and some post-structuralists cannot be accepted as well-founded. More right are those researchers who interpret power as one of the social phenomena. The interpretation of power as an absolute and total and at the same time completely decentered phenomenon, of course, is not applicable to human history, starting with the primitive system and ending with the twenty-first century. Of course, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the coming 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, some forms of power are armed with various means of manipulating the consciousness and behavior of people, but this does not mean that some kind of power, devoid of specification, is operating.

In this regard, the position of Luhmann and Giddens seems to be more acceptable. But not so acceptable as to be accepted as quite adequate. Luhmann and Giddens are authors whose concepts are in almost every respect inconsistent with the classical tradition. In order to criticize their interpretation of the phenomenon of power, it is necessary to criticize almost all the concepts they use. This, first of all, concerns the concepts of "activity" and "communication", with which power is associated. Their interpretation of these concepts is so primitive that it is somehow even inconvenient for them. It seems that neither Immanuel Kant, nor Marx, nor Karl Jaspers, nor many other classics existed for them. It is no wonder that they feel like pioneers: one is activity, the other is communication. Consequently, these interpretations of power are also untenable. A more adequate concept of power should be sought from other researchers.

## Conclusion.

In theological inquiry, the imperative of critical and comparative-critical analysis remains paramount for the evolution of a genuine understanding of the subject under scrutiny. This principle resonates profoundly in the exploration of the intricate phenomenon of power. By subjecting the concepts of power to rigorous critique, the revelation of inherent virtues to be embraced alongside inherent shortcomings becomes evident, mirroring the theological process of discerning virtues within human nature while acknowledging the presence of inherent imperfections. In this pursuit, theology offers a guiding light, advocating for the assimilation of constructive elements from diverse concepts of power while remaining steadfast in the discernment of negative attributes that should find no place within a more comprehensive and authentic theological framework of power. Over the history of philosophical, political, sociological and other studies of power, many different interpretations of this phenomenon have accumulated. All of them are subject to critical analysis. This article analyzes only three variants of the concept of power presented by four authors. This analysis showed that the considered concepts of power are not those that can be part of some integral concept of this phenomenon.

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